

THE PROSE STYLE OF HERMAN MELVILLE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1845, Herman Melville wrote an account of his experiences in the Marquesas, which was published in 1846 under the title, Typee. As a result of the popularity of this book and a companion volume of adventure in the South Seas, Omoo, published a year later, Melville achieved both considerable fame as a writer of romances and considerable notoriety as "the man who lived among cannibals." In 1849, he published Mardi -- "to see whether, the fiction might not, possibly be received for a verity: in some degree the reverse of my previous experience," he says in the Preface. The book was an unmistakable failure, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the variety of material Melville crammed into it. Redburn and White Jacket, his next two novels, are semi-autobiographical, although there is evidence of growth in creative power in both. The best known of Melville's works today is Moby Dick, published in 1851, now acclaimed as his masterpiece, but somewhat dubiously accepted by contemporary critics. In 1852, Melville published Pierre, a book which remains almost as much of an unsolved critical problem as it was when the New York Literary World said of it: "It is alone intelligible as an unintelligibility."¹

¹Quoted by Meade Minnigerode, Some Personal Letters of Herman Melville and a Bibliography, p. 163.

In seven years Melville had written and published seven volumes. He was unable, however, to keep up this amazing output; in the thirty-nine years of his life following the publication of Pierre, he brought the total number of published works to fourteen. Four of the later volumes were in verse. Outside of these, Melville wrote magazine articles, book reviews, and a novel, Billy Budd, which was not published until long after his death. Many of his works were never reprinted until Constable and Company published a standard edition in 1922.¹

Considering the comparative popularity which he enjoyed and his notable success in literature before he reached the age of thirty, one wonders at the long and for the most part undeserved eclipse which Melville suffered, not only during the last years of his life but also for at least thirty years following his death. But the "steam of adulation" which Melville describes as rising from the grave of an author, however late in his own case, has been blowing off for some time now. Carl Van Doren sums up the last eighteen years of Melville-mania when he says of Melville:

Since 1922 there have been four times as many editions of Moby Dick in America and England as during the years before, and more than ever of all of his chief books. He has been at once a hero to literary rebels and the object of much academic research. His life has been investigated in detail, his opinions analyzed, his art minutely studied. His stories have been traced to other sources besides his own experience or observation, even

¹Complete Works of Herman Melville (16 Vols.) London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1922, 1924.

his autobiography shown to have often been invented or taken from his reading. But no discovery of his sources can lessen the wonder of that native power with which he transmuted them, lifting them from the flat documents to high magic and lively wit. He remains the best, as he was the first, story-teller of the Pacific, and Moby Dick is the epic of the ocean.¹

It is with this "high magic and lively wit" that one is confronted when one considers the style of Herman Melville.

The object of this study is not an evaluation of the whole of Melville's work but an analysis of the prose which reached its height in Moby Dick, of the development of that style, and, briefly, the turn which it took after the writing of that book. An attempt is made to show the factors contributing to the development of this style: namely, the emotional and intellectual background of Melville and the facts and feelings which he sought to convey. Some of the means which Melville chose in order to achieve this manner of expression are indicated in their more technical aspects, together with the relationship of the stylistic devices to the subject matter, and the evidence of possible external influences. Particular attention has been paid to the so-called "poetic devices" (in the broad sense), and special emphasis has been placed upon rhythm and tone color.

Buffon said, "Le style, c'est l'homme même," and one can scarcely fail to recognize the inevitable influence of a writer's life not only upon his manner of thinking but upon his manner of expression as well. But to discern per-

¹Carl Van Doren, The American Novel, p. 102.

sonal idiosyncrasy in style is not to mark its excellence. Style in itself is an elusive quality distinguished in its entirety only in the work of which it is a part. One must recognize at the outset the artificiality of any sharp separation of the form of the work from its substance. This separation may be necessary, at least for the time being, in an analysis of the elements which are the tangible basis of style; yet these elements must be looked upon as more than the external trappings of thought.

The question which might be raised by the theory of style as pure syllabic music hardly arises in Melville's style since his most highly ornate passages are not without emotional and intellectual significance. The direct perceptive pattern is subordinate.

That there can be style which is not dependent upon embellishment is evidenced by the writers who have achieved greatness by an "unaccented" style. This type of writing may not attain the maximum of emotional suggestion, but when feeling is subordinate, the simpler style may be eminently successful. On the other hand, there are styles which are definitely artificial in the sense that the writer has not attempted to approximate the normal mode of expression; nevertheless, the ornaments which he assumes for his purpose are by no means necessarily "a miserable procession of knock-kneed, broken-winded metaphors with a cruel cartload of ponderous, unmeaning polysyllables dragging behind them."

¹J. Middleton Murry, The Problem of Style, p. 11.

True style consists in harmony between the writer's temper, his subject matter, and his expression. In such a perfect blending, there is a personal element which enables one to read a passage and say, "That's Carlyle," or to compare the style of one writer with that of another; but the various styles will be the result of thought and emotion and will have no separate existence in themselves.

If a man's thoughts are his own and if they determine the form which his work takes, then whatever has been of influence in his life: social background, education, reading, friends, and family, is reflected in his style. The writer's manner of thinking will appear in his turn of thought; this thought, that is, the essential peculiarity of his vision, will make the turn of phrase in which he incorporates his thought recognizable.¹ The style which results will be a truly organic thing. It was DeQuincey who said:

The more closely any exercise of mind is connected with what is internal and individual in the sensibilities, -- that is, with what is philosophically termed subjective, -- precisely in that degree, and the more subtly, does the style or the embodying of the thoughts cease to be a mere separate ornament, and in fact the more does the manner . . . become confluent with the matter.²

If a "characteristic" style is an outgrowth of the writer's individual way of feeling and seeing, the merit

¹ J. Middleton Murry, op. cit., p. 5.

² Thomas DeQuincey, Style, in Paul M. Fulcher, Foundations of English Style, p. 42.

of the style will depend upon the perceptibility of its reference to the mode of feeling, "the soul," as Flaubert said, "which gives the words their being."¹ The writer must have within himself the highly personalized emotions which compel an individual manner of expression, or the experience which he is attempting to convey must be sufficiently remote from the ordinary range of human experience for the reader to feel that the style is a legitimate outgrowth of the problem of expression.

Herman Melville was a writer whose style grew out of an unusual emotional background and served as a medium of expression for subject matter equally unconventional. His attitude toward life was developed and strengthened by the impressions he received from actual observation of life. Although depending upon his literary work for a livelihood, he refused to allow the taste of the age for which he wrote to enter into his considerations, and throughout his work, his emotional predisposition reveals itself. The medium which he chose at first was prose (ordinarily conceived as the medium for cool intellectual communication and deliberate common sense, though as a matter of fact, prose is in no way restricted to an appeal which is solely intellectual). Of course, as a form of control for intensely personal emotion, verse is admittedly wide in range, and in his later works, Melville turned to this medium; but at least as broad

¹Quoted by J. Middleton Murry, op. cit., p. 16.

are the possibilities of prose as Melville himself proves in Moby Dick. But regardless of whether the author chooses prose or poetry for his medium, the bare success of a style will depend upon the communication of thought or emotion, and its greatness upon the "comprehensiveness of the system of emotions and thoughts to which the reference is perceptible."¹ Thought and emotion include the whole effect which the thought is supposed to produce, but this is scarcely secured outside of the work itself.

The purpose of an analysis is the differentiation of this total emotional effect into a series of intellectual concepts which will stand for parts of the whole. Sometimes it is possible to catch a bit of the emotion in a quotation, or a summary may be given of a phase of the material when its significance can be captured in a condensation. The devices which too often receive full credit as style may be shown as merely separate means of complete aesthetic communication; the suggestion of sensory imagery and, on the formal side, the musical suggestion of rhythm and tone color are significant details of the essential quality of style -- these direct or indirect perceptions are the psychological elements which are fused in any form of literary expression.

In criticism the best one can hope for is the maintenance of balanced judgment. The emotional background of

¹J. Middleton Murry, op. cit., p. 71.

the writer can be fairly accurately ascertained from biography if his works do not speak for themselves and their writer in the choice of subject matter. To arrive at an acceptable analysis of style it is necessary to understand the parts and the relation between them in the living body which is the whole work, but Melville had in his style and in the life of which it is a reflection a personality so powerful that part of the story of the style lies in the comprehension of the man himself.

CHAPTER II

MELVILLE'S LIFE AND WORK AS A WHOLE AS RELATED TO HIS STYLE¹

In Melville's life lies the explanation of his career: "its brilliant early achievement, its long dark eclipse;"² for his life is, in effect, the private history of his work; first, because of the autobiographical features which figure so largely in the works; secondly, because of the circumstances under which the narratives took form. Having determined the relation between Melville's life and his work as a whole, one can turn more readily to the analytic differentiation of the elements of his style.

Melville said of himself, "Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life." As a matter of fact, he was twenty-seven when his first book, Typee, was published, and Moby Dick, his best work, was not written until he was thirty-two. But Melville's growth was well begun before he sat down to catalogue his adventures in the South Seas. The society into which he was born in 1819 was a provincial one in the fullest sense of the word, and not a little of Melville's life and work is tied up with the gradual undermining of that society which was finally accomplished by the Civil War.

¹The biographical material on Melville has been drawn from Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic; Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville; and Meade Minnigerode, Some Personal Letters of Herman Melville and a Bibliography.

✓ ²Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic, p. 17.

As a child of six Melville was described by his father as being "solid" and "profound," and isolation enforced by illness only emphasized the reflective turn of the mind of the boy who, when his father brought home some new pieces of furniture, wondered "where the wood grew: whether the workmen who made them still survived, and what they could be doing with themselves now." Melville grew up in the romantic atmosphere of Manhattan, and the sights he saw there, together with the interest aroused by the books and pictures which Allan Melville brought home to his family, caused him to think early in life "how fine it would be to be able to talk about remote barbarous regions."

Before his father died, leaving his family bankrupt, Melville had attended the Albany Academy, where he probably received the usual instruction in the classics. From 1832 until 1836, he worked at various clerical positions, helped his uncle on a farm, and taught school. Not content with the confines of a business routine or a teaching position, he turned to his dreams of distant ports. Perhaps he saw in an ocean voyage the means of recapturing his old ambitions. At any rate, at the age of seventeen, Melville shipped passage to Liverpool.

Redburn is the story of this voyage, written more than ten years later, but Melville also recalls this experience in Moby Dick:

No, when I go down to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the fore-castle, aloft there to the royal mast-head. True, they rather order me about, and make me jump from spar to spar,

like a grasshopper in a May meadow. And at first, this sort of thing is unpleasant enough. It touches one's sense of honor, particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes. And more than all, if just previous to putting your hand into the tar-pot, you have been lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe of you. The transition is a keen one, I assure you, from a schoolmaster to a sailor, and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and the Stoics to enable you to grin and bear it. But even this wears off in time.¹

Redburn purports to be the confessions of a seventeen-year-old boy, but as an artistic creation, it belongs to a later period in Melville's career. Before Melville wrote this intimate and vivid account, he had had considerable practice not only in writing but also in living.

Returning from Liverpool, Melville again taught school. During this period he indulged in some secret writing of which there is evidence in two clippings from The Democratic Press and Lansingburgh Advertiser for May 4 and May 18, 1839. His lack of maturity is shown by the fact that he did not see in his voyage the material for his literary endeavors, but turned to the conventional subject of love, which he "embellished with every polite accomplishment."² These sketches were written anonymously and were entitled simply "Fragments from a Writing Desk." The allusions to a host of major and minor deities, remote corners of this world and the

¹

Herman Melville, Romances of Herman Melville, Moby Dick, p. 761. See note p. 41.

² Quoted from Fragment I, by Raymond Weaver, op. cit., pp. 116-120.

next, references to Burton, Lord Chesterfield, Milton, Byron, Scott, Coleridge, and Shakespeare indicate an already wide reading knowledge and foreshadow the ornamental style of Melville's fully-developed prose.

X The manner of this writing is that of high-flown exaggeration and extravagance. Melville calls the Muses to his aid, invokes visions of Fairy Land, and describes the village maidens as "all varieties, all the orders of Beauty's architecture."¹

And then her eyes! they open their dark rich orbs upon you like the full moon of heaven, and blaze into your very soul the fires of day! Like offerings laid upon the sacrificial altars of the Hebrew, when in an instant the divine spark falling from the propitiated God kindled them in flames; so, a single glance from the Oriental eye as quickly fires your soul, and leaves your bosom in a perfect conflagration.²

Melville published nothing between the appearance of these clippings and the publication of Typee, but the style of the latter is vastly different. The language is clear and straight-forward; most of the elaborate ornament has disappeared. It was from this point that Melville dated his career, but it is evident that deep changes had taken place in him during the three years that he spent in wandering.

On January 3, 1841, Melville left New Bedford on the whale-ship Acushnet. There is no definite record of this voyage although Melville probably utilized his experiences in

¹Quoted from Fragment I by Raymond Weaver, op. cit., pp. 116-120.

²Ibid.

writing Moby Dick. The next definite knowledge of Melville is that which he gives in Typee, at the beginning of which he is making plans to escape from his ship. To follow the story of Typee, one learns that Melville and "Toby," an equally adventurous young man, manage to desert the ship. The story of their descent into the valley of the dreaded cannibals, the disappearance of Toby, the period of Melville's "captivity" among the Typees, and his eventual escape makes up the first of the South Sea Island volumes.

The sequel, Omoo, takes Melville after his escape from the cannibal valley to Tahiti, where he and the crew of the ship which "rescued" him are imprisoned for mutiny when they refuse to take the mismanaged, ill-provisioned "Little Jule" out to sea while the captain recuperates from an illness. The jail-keeper, a friendly and good-natured Polynesian, is persuaded to make their confinement a light one, and after several futile attempts on the part of the officers and the consul to persuade the crew to return to the ship, the Julia sails with a new crew recruited from the vagrant population of the island.

Left on the island with no visible means of support, Melville and his companion, Doctor Long Ghost, the ship's doctor and a man of some learning, who "quoted Virgil, and talked of Hobbes of Malmesbury, besides repeating poetry by the Canto, especially Hudibras," roam the islands, living off the friendly natives for the most part and working for a time on a farm belonging to a Cockney and a Yankee from Maine. If such a

doctor there was, he undoubtedly added to Melville's ripening knowledge, for Melville says that he read all of the doctor's books, including a treatise on scarlet fever, and Doctor Long Ghost himself was a revelation of sorts.

Leaving Tahiti on a whale-ship bound for Japan, Melville evidently spent some time cruising in the Pacific, for he mentions returning to the islands, and eventually landed in Honolulu. The impressions of the Sandwich Islands he later added to the commentary on the Marquesas and Tahiti. In the summer of 1834, he boarded the frigate United States and was homeward bound.

Life on board the man-of-war was strictly regulated, and as far as the common sailors were concerned, the conditions were exceedingly difficult. Nevertheless, Melville spent many happy hours on the maintop with his friend Jack Chase, and others, with books from the ship's library: Walpole's Letters, The Jew of Malta, Volpone, and books of travel and adventure: Morgan's History of Algiers and Knox's Captivity in Ceylon. Mumford emphasizes the importance of this reading to Melville's career:

Coming as they did, after a long period of abstention and thirst, these books had a profound influence upon Melville; and they gave him his literary pedigree. Through his experience of life, he broke away by necessity from the weak romantics of his youth, and, seeking the nearest parallels to his own adventure and meditation and visions, he found them in the Elizabethan dramatists and the seventeenth century travellers and literary philosophers. Melville's genius followed two separate lines of growth, which joined in Moby Dick: one of them was that of Marlowe and Webster, with their untrammelled emotions, their stertorous vitality, and their keen transpositions of dream into reality and of reality into dream -- the other was that of Knox's

Captivity, direct, honest, well-ballasted. Had not these books been in the ship's library, Melville might have taken much longer to find himself.¹

At home Melville found his family in very straitened circumstances, and partly from the promise of financial return attempted his first long work. He was undoubtedly attracted to a career of writing, and here was the opportunity to profit from his wasted years, and besides, his friends were clamoring for him to put his adventures into a book.² The method which Melville used in writing this can be discovered from various clues in the book itself. In the Preface Melville says that the incidents had served to "relieve the weariness of many a nightwatch at sea." The fact that the material had been "spun as a yarn" may have served to fix the details in Melville's memory, and he wrote instinctively, filling out his background with reading of every account of the South Seas he could find: Cook's voyages, missionary reports, travelers' descriptions.³ This practice of reference to information he secured at second hand is characteristic of Melville's later style, and through it his writing gains in reality what it may lose in originality.

Although Melville was later accused of being "a prejudiced, incompetent, and truthless witness,"⁴ he actually

¹Lewis Mumford, op. cit., p. 58.

²Raymond Weaver, op. cit., p. 252.

³Lewis Mumford, op. cit., p. 69.

⁴Quoted by Weaver, op. cit., Ecclectic Review, (reprinted in Living Age, Vol. XXVII) p. 225.

attempted to be exceedingly accurate in his narrative. He apologizes for the necessity of omitting dates and the explanations of origins and purposes of native customs, saying that he "has stated such matters just as they occurred and leaves everyone to form his own opinion concerning them."¹ The story as far as Toby is concerned was vouched for by that individual himself, who had also managed to get back to civilization; and the digressions Melville hoped would be justified by possible interest in the subjects.

In this real or pretended air of reality lies the key to Melville's genius. He exercised his imagination and was truly creative, but he was always forced back to the actual world for the basis of his story. Sentimentality has no place in this reality. Melville's romance is too much the romance of life itself to be altogether confined to palm trees and lovely maidens. He was as much interested in the misguided efforts of the missionaries and the political problems of the islands and in the flora and fauna of the valley of the Typees or its cannibal inhabitants. His treatment is candid to the point of naïveté at times, and in this point of view, Melville discovered the useful tool of satire.²

Typee was a literary success, although its popularity may have been due in part to the fuss raised over its supposed infidelity and to the presence in the book of scenes

¹Herman Melville, Preface to Typee, op. cit., p. 4.

²Meade Winnigerode, op. cit., pp. 109-123.

which were considered loose and immoral. These passages seem comparatively mild today, but the public for which Melville wrote was still one of delicate sensibilities, and in the Revised Edition, the passages which pointed to the misguided efforts of the missionaries, and the anecdotes, however nicely phrased, which seemed either too graphic or too suggestive to the holders of the blue pencil, were eliminated.¹

Literary critics received Typee cordially, however, recognizing the first competent literary treatment of the South Seas (previously there had only been records of travels and missionary reports) and an author who offered "a new manner in the history of letters."² Mumford says of the style of Typee:

It is written with a skill that is beyond skill, with the clarity beside which a more deliberate artifice would be clumsy.³

When Omoo appeared a year later, 1847, the Columbian Review stated:

Typee has been read, we suppose, by every man, woman, and child in the Union, who undertakes to keep pace at all with the march of current literature; and its fame has gone abroad also to lands beyond the sea.⁴

¹Meade Minnigerode, op. cit., pp. 109-123.

²Raymond Weaver, op. cit., p. 203.

³Lewis Mumford, op. cit., p. 72.

⁴Quoted by Minnigerode, op. cit., p. 132.

The subject matter of Typee is limited somewhat, but Melville added a great deal of purely expository material on native customs, contrasted the primitive society with that which he had known at home -- much to the detriment of the latter -- and commented upon missionary practices and French governmental tactics. These digressions were drawn partly from the reading which Melville had done or from his later experiences.

Omoo is much broader in scope, dealing with the conditions which Melville found on board the ship; the religious, social, and political life of the "civilized" natives of Tahiti and Imoee; and containing, in addition, the first of Melville's real character creations. The natives in Typee are for the most part mere sketches, but the crew of the Julia, her officers, the consul of Tahiti and the official doctor, missionaries, natives, and foreign planters are graphically drawn. The narrative is more elaborate and ambitious in its scope, for Melville is attempting not only to convey the life of the sailors who man the sailing vessels which navigate the remote waters of the South Seas, but also to give an accurate account of the conditions among the converted Polynesians as they "struck an unbiased observer."¹

In both books there are the same types of digression, which form the background of the narrative. This discursive habit is conscious with Melville. In Omoo at the conclusion

¹Herman Melville, Preface to Omoo, op. cit., p. 189.

of a discussion of the wild cattle in Polynesia, he says, "After this digression, it is time to run on after Tonoï and the Yankee,"¹ the latter being characters in the story. The material on the geography and history of the islands, native customs, food, clothing, is added to the rather bare outline of the narrative, and all is told with the matter-of-fact style which characterizes Melville's early writing and the clarity of expression which he always commanded. The language is comparatively free of the affectations noticed in the *Lansingburgh* newspaper; details are selected with what seems an effortless accuracy. There is a poise and serenity in the point of view which is seen again in parts of Melville's later work, but which never again pervades the atmosphere as it does in *Typee* and *Omoo*.²

↓ Some of the descriptions are quite lovely in effect, but occasionally in *Omoo* there is evidence of the poetic quality of Melville's later writing, which seems overdone when it occurs in connection with the early style:

It was the earliest dawn. The morning only showed itself along the lower edge of a bank of purple clouds, pierced by the misty peaks of Tahiti. The tropical day seemed too languid to rise. Sometimes, starting fitfully, it decked the clouds with faint edging of pink and grey, which, fading away, left all dim again. Anon, it threw out thin, pale rays, growing lighter and lighter, until at last, the golden morning sprang

¹Herman Melville, *Omoo*, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

²Lewis Mumford, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

out of the East with a bound -- darting its bright beams hither and thither, higher and higher, and sending them, broadcast, over the face of the heavens.¹

The general tone of the book is not one which supports this "fine writing"; and the effect is hardly short of ludicrous, when a few lines farther on the doctor is "hopping, skipping, and jumping along the beach; but very careful to cut all his capers in the direction of the journey." The description in Typee usually avoids this flaw, being carefully detailed or generally panoramic, so that it fits the lucid narrative manner.

√ This early writing of Melville's is full of the humor which never deserts him. Sometimes the digs are so subtle that they pass almost unnoticed, so involved are they in the manner of expression. √ This mocking laughter appears later in a more sardonic form, but Melville was not writing out of bitterness of heart but out of fullness of spirit. Even possible starvation after six months at sea he treats in a mock-serious manner which is one of the best qualities of his style:

Even the bark that once clung to the wood we use for fuel has been gnawed off and devoured by the captain's pig; and so long ago, too, that the pig himself has in turn been devoured.

The cock, lone remaining fowl, will be the next to go:

His attenuated body will be laid out upon the captain's table next Sunday, and long before night will be buried with all the usual ceremonies beneath that worthy individual's vest.²

¹Herman Melville, Omoo, op. cit., p. 330.

²Herman Melville, Typee, op. cit., p. 11.

In his attack on the false ideas put forth by men who had made only "little kid-glove excursions ashore," Melville is, however, pointedly sarcastic:

The French had then held possession of the Marquesas some time, and already prided themselves upon the beneficial effects of their jurisdiction, as discernible in the deportment of the natives. To be sure, in one of their efforts at reform they had slaughtered about a hundred and fifty of them at Whitiho -- but let that pass.¹

Of the missionary reports he says:

Did not the sacred character of these persons render the purity of their intentions unquestionable, I should certainly be led to suppose that they had exaggerated the evils of Paganism, in order to enhance the spirit of their own disinterested labours.²

\ The society of his day is held up to ridicule. He says that a cannibal continued his harangue, "in emulation of our more polished orators," and describes his own island costume as resembling a lady's petticoat, "only I did not have recourse to those voluminous paddings in the rear with which our gentle dames are in the habit of augmenting the sublime rotundity of their figures." He compares the bliss of the island inhabitants with the countless irritations "that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his felicity":

There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honor in Typee; no unreasonable tailors and shoemakers perversely bent upon being paid; no duns of any descriptions; no assault and battery attorney, to foment discord. . . , no poor relations, everlastingly occupying the spare bed-chamber, and diminishing elbow room at the family table....³

¹Herman Melville, Typee, op. cit., p. 14.

²Ibid., pp. 120-121.

³Ibid., p. 92.

Obviously these books are no mere chronicles of events, nor are they pictures of "heathenish rites and human sacrifices." Melville deliberately introduces the typical images which the name "Marquesas" conjures up, in order to point to the fact that of these "naked houris" and "cannibal banquets" there is little in his observations. If cannibalism was practiced, he was unable to secure any more proof than that of the three human heads which he discovered in a bag hanging from the ridge pole of his hut and the occurrence of mysterious ceremonies from which he was banned. Melville based his story on solid facts which he drew from his own experience and the vast amount of reading which he had done.

Gaining confidence in his literary ability, Melville set to work on two new books, but not before he had married Elizabeth Shaw, and assumed the responsibility of a family. He moved to New York, where he and his wife lived with his brother Allan and his three sisters. Fortunately for Melville, his sister Augusta was tireless in copying and correcting manuscript, for he was a rather careless writer, and already his eyes were growing weak so that he had to give them as much rest as possible.

✓ The first of these books was Mardi, in which Melville attempted to become truly inventive, although at times he seems to be in a mood of burlesque and rollicking nonsense. But whatever his attitude in writing Mardi, there is no doubt that its reception left him a sadder and wiser man. He wrote to his publisher from London, in December, 1849:

What a madness and anguish it is, that an author can never -- under no conceivable circumstances -- be at all frank with his readers.) Could I, for one, be frank with them, how would they cease their railing-- those at least who have railed. . . . I once said something 'critical' about another man's book -- I shall never do it again. . . . Had I not written and published 'Mardi' in all likelihood I would not be as wise as I am now, or may be. For that thing was stabbed at (I do not say through) and therefore I am the wiser for it.¹

Not all of the reviews were severe, however, and Melville is soon laughing ironically at his own failure:

. . . let me supplementarily hint that a bit of old parchment (from some old Arabic M.S.S. [sic] on Astrol-ogy) tied around each volume, and sealed on the back with a Sphinx and never broken till the aloe flowers-- would not be an unsuitable device for the bookbinding of 'Mardi.'²

He had acquired the freedom and intellectual audacity which gave him the strength to master his own greatness.

The very evidences of approaching maturity, however, are the weaknesses of Mardi, because as yet these devices are beyond Melville's absolute control; and the lack of balance and unity, the obscurity or complete neglect of a centralizing theme make the book seem utterly wild. There are, however, sections which compare favorably with anything which Melville ever wrote, as well as passages of pure fantasy and symbolism which gained for him the title of the American Rabelais.³ There is satire and criticism of life

¹Quoted by Minnigerode, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

²Ibid., p. 42.

³Weaver, op. cit., p. 105.

which is often remarkable in its finish. There are pages of philosophical commentary which would make excellent essay material. There is humor, though at the bottom it is the laughter of despair: "It is good to laugh though the laugh be hollow. . . . Humor, thy laugh is divine; hence mirth-making idiots have been revered; and so may I."¹ The wide knowledge, the delving into man's inner nature are typically Melvilleian, but the display is incoherent, lacking the sure handling which enabled Melville to carry an equal load in Moby Dick and do it successfully.

Redburn, published the same year as Mardi, is the least Melvilleian of the early books, but at the same time, it appears to be the most definitely autobiographical. There is less of romance and adventure in it than in the South Sea novels, and none of the mysticism and incoherence of Mardi. Weaver says that it is written with "inverted idealism" and builds "not castles, but dungeons in Spain." The tumbling of these ideals may be thought of as being symbolized by the old guide book which Redburn carries with him, only to find that it is fifty years out of date, and that the places on which he has lavished hours of fancy have long been torn down or utterly changed in character.

Just as Redburn is disappointed in the England which he sees: no castles, only old shops and warehouses, none of the old monuments which the tourist sees, only the docks

¹Herman Melville, Mardi, op. cit., p. 718.

through which a sailor boy may tramp; so there is little glorification of the merchant service -- the narrative is "no chronicle of vanished fleets and brave memories."¹ John Masefield has said that Redburn is his favorite of Melville's books: "a boy's book about running away to sea. . . ."² The book had been preceded only by Nathaniel Ames' A Mariner's Sketches (1830) and Dana's Two Years Before the Mast (1840) as a record of what passes in the forecastle of a ship, and as a piece of description, Redburn is much more vivid than Dana's "vigorous, faithful, modest narrative."³

Although Melville thought of it as a mere potboiler, Redburn is the creation of a maturing artist; the ship and its crew are made to live. The account is amplified through Redburn's emotions and sensations, and the details of the sordid life which he sees are described with a ruthless and objective realism which somewhat discounts Melville's ostentatious contempt for this particular work of his. There is positive mastery in the account of the slow death through starvation of the mother and children whom Redburn found lying in a cellar, and whose lives he tried in vain to save, and the sketches of the dock-wall beggars are marvelously varied and graphic. There is humor, too, in these keen

¹Weaver, op. cit., p. 84.

²Quoted by Minnigerode, op. cit., p. 50.

³Weaver, op. cit., p. 81.

descriptive efforts:

The thing they called coffee was the most curious tasting drink, and tasted as little like coffee as it did like lemonade. But what was more curious still was the different quality and taste of it on different mornings. Sometimes it tasted fishy, as if it were a decoction of Dutch herring; and then it would taste very salt, as if some old horse or sea-beef had been boiled in it; and then again it would taste a sort of cheesy, as if the captain had sent his cheese-parings forward to make our coffee of; and yet another time it would have such a very bad flavour, that I was almost ready to think some old stocking heels had been boiled in it. Notwithstanding the disagreeableness of the flavour, I always used to have a strange curiosity every morning to see what new taste it was going to have; and I never missed making a new discovery and adding another taste to my palate.¹

There are a few digressions on the ship-board customs which were at first very puzzling to Redburn. A whole chapter is spent discussing guide books which his father had collected, including the one which he found so useless. He also discusses the conditions among the sailors and among the emigrants on the voyage home. The most elaborate chapter is one concerning a mysterious trip to London, which reminds one of the Arabian Nights description in one of the early Fragments, and there is another highly imaginative passage which describes Redburn's reverie as an Italian emigrant boy plays his organ. /Even in this book are the characteristics of Melville's style which make it a peculiarly personal thing: sly humor, deliberate irony, graphic description./

Before Redburn was published Melville had begun his next book, White Jacket. Here again he reached back into his

¹ Redburn, p. 1494-1495.

past for the material basis of his art, and in this book there is the first evidence of the real control which Melville had developed over his medium. In Typee his art was unconscious and instinctive; in Mardi it was deliberate but formless. But White Jacket, except that it lacks the magnificent conception which makes Moby Dick what it is, is probably as well written. Melville is not carried away by bitterness in this work as he is sometimes in his next book, and there are not the multiplicity of purple passages which take the eye in Moby Dick, hurrying the reader past a reasonable level of judgment. In White Jacket, in spite of the vigor and harshness of the attack on conditions found on ship-board, Melville is more of the happy-go-lucky Stubb of Moby Dick; he is irrepressible, laughing at his misfortunes with his jacket, "not a very white jacket, but white enough, in all conscience, as the sequel will show"; describing even the ghastliness of slow death by exposure with an unquenchable zest.

↓ The germ of whiteness is a tiny one in this volume, but it is a hint towards the theme of Moby Dick, in which Melville cultivated this idea until it became the great white whale, "the gliding great demon of the seas of life." The prose of White Jacket is probably the best Melville had written to date, and the style is consistently sustained.

The authenticity of White Jacket is vouched for by Rear Admiral Franklin in his Memoirs of a Rear Admiral, although the admiral was not quite sure of the exact position Herman Melville occupied. He says:

At Tahiti¹ we picked up some seamen who were on the consul's hands. They were entered on the books of the ship, and became a portion of the crew. One of the number was Herman Melville, who became famous afterward as a writer and an admiralty lawyer.²

Melville's life in the navy was probably the happiest period of his life. His presentation of the life on board the ship is as real as the graphic pictures of Redburn, but without the mawkish sentiments of the seventeen year old boy. The sense of the complexity of the existence is given without the confusion of Mardi. "I let nothing slip, however small," he says "and feel myself actuated by the same motive which has prompted many worthy old chroniclers to set down the merest trifles concerning things that are destined to pass entirely from the earth, and which, if not preserved in the nick of time, must infallibly perish from the memories of man." There are black pictures also; the death of a man who broke his leg at the hands of the surgeon who decided to amputate is said by Weaver to be "a scene that Flaubert might well have been proud to have written."³

It is the sustained lightness of White Jacket which makes its style differ from that of Moby Dick. The whole seems to move rapidly and in a rollicking manner in spite of the many digressions, which take the form of expository material about

¹ Melville states in Omoo that he left the island on a whaling vessel; there is no reference to the point at which he joined the frigate in White Jacket; the ship is in Callao, Peru, when the story opens.

² Quoted by Weaver, op. cit., p. 234.

³ Ibid., p. 243.

ship-board habits, yarns which the seamen spun on the main-top, philosophical comments by the author, and the various personal anecdotes which serve to fill out the long days at sea. Even in this straight-forward story there is a good deal of the manner which Melville perfected in Moby Dick. There is a great deal more ornament in the way of allusions than is found in any of the previous books. The amount of reading Melville had done is apparent in this book, but before he began Moby Dick, the images which filled his mind had been made even more concrete by his European travels.

Finishing White Jacket in the fall of 1849, Melville took the manuscript to England to see whether he could improve his income. For the first time here is a record which he himself kept, a journal written in the fragmentary manner of most diaries; furnishing a first-hand account of his trip abroad, this journal points to interests which offer clues to sources of Melville's more elaborate style. He visited Canterbury Cathedral, remarking--"Henry II, his wife, and the Black Prince are here--and Becket." In Moby Dick he describes the Pequod: "Her ancient decks were worn and wrinkled like the pilgrim-worshipped flag-stone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled." He dined at the Falstaff Inn; one recalls his love of Shakespeare, the pocket edition which he carried in his "white jacket," and the frequent Shakespearean allusions of his later writing.

It is evident that a number of the impressions of this voyage found their way into Melville's subsequent writing. He spent a short time on the continent: at Paris, Brussels,

Cologne. Of Coblenz, he wrote: ✓ "Most curious that the finest wine of all the Rhine is grown right under the guns of Ehrenbreitstein."¹ This "frowning fortress" must have made considerable impression upon Melville, for he alludes to it in both Moby Dick and Pierre.

✓ Notes in this journal also throw light upon Melville's reading at the time. He roamed the second-hand book shops, picking up a copy of Rousseau's Confessions and a 1686 folio of Sir Thomas Browne; he mentions a bachelor party he attended as recalling "poor Lamb's 'Old Benchers'"; he began and finished the Opium Eater, as he called it--"a most wonderful book." He also mentions buying an old book which he might use should he decide to "serve up the Revolutionary narrative of the beggar." He does not give the name of the book, but the narrative is undoubtedly that of Israel Potter, which he did "serve up."

Returning to the United States, Melville moved his family to the Berkshires, where he purchased "Arrowhead," the farm on which he spent the next and most productive years of his life. ✓ It was here that Melville discovered Hawthorne, and here that he wrote Moby Dick. A great deal of preparation went into the writing of this work; a great deal of Melville himself went into it, also. When he began writing he was in fine health, full of material for fifty books, as he wrote to Mr. Duyckinck; but there was not only the writing to do, but also the work around the farm, and the intense efforts which he put

¹ Quoted by Raymond Weaver, op. cit., p. 298.

forth left Melville's body and mind drained of strength. His wife writes that he would often sit for hours without writing a word, or perhaps as he says himself, he wrote with one eye closed and the other blinking to save his fading eye-sight. The book was finished in New York during the last days of the summer of 1851. Melville wrote to Hawthorne that he felt that he was wearing himself out: what he felt like writing would not sell, and he could not write the "other way." So he finished up the whale in "some fashion or another."

In Moby Dick are all of the qualities which are to be found in his other works; combined in this single volume, they exist in a harmony whose paradox can be explained only by the intensity of effort and the magnificence of the vision which enabled Melville to create Moby Dick. It is, in effect, a tour de force, for it contradicts Melville's realism, his adherence to fact, the structural weakness of which he is accused, yet it has these very qualities in it. In this book, Melville used much of the material which had been part of the substance of his autobiographical narratives, and he added to this realistic material the philosophy of Mardi. The sea was still one of the frontiers of the world; it offered a means of conveying an idea and at the same time gave Melville a great body of tradition and fact which he utilized to advantage. The digressions are lavish. Melville undertook "a draught of a systematization of cetology," and he says, "I have swum through whole libraries and sailed through oceans." In Moby Dick one finds one of the most complete accounts of a whaling voyage ever written, and so packed is the allegory with vital facts

that it is often read without the slightest recognition of the deeper meaning. But all of these are mere accessories.

The plot is simple, but Melville makes it tragic, even cosmic.) Although Melville protests that his novel is not "a hideous and intolerable allegory," it has been variously interpreted as such. The theme is the result of the speculation of Melville's later years and the bitterness and disillusion of his youth. In trying to reduce nature to a formula, he seems to have made up his mind that evil is rampant in the world.¹ To the seeing eye, Melville declared,

. . . the palsied universe lies before us as a leper;
. . . all defiled nature paints like a harlot, whose garments cover nothing but the charnel house within.²

In the drama of Ahab, Melville found a theme which exactly suited his capacities; to Ahab the white whale was the symbol of "that intangible malignity which has been from the beginning," and "he pitted himself, all mutilated against it . . . He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down. . . Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?"³

Van Doren says,

The passion in Moby Dick makes the language always high, often top-lofty, whether the chapters in their changing sequence are given over to speculation, information, poetry, or comedy.⁴

¹ Carl Van Doren, op. cit., p. 91.

² Moby Dick, p. 877.

³ Ibid., p. 870.

⁴ Carl Van Doren, op. cit., p. 96.

And Mumford:

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One can give no proper hint of this work, even in its smallest detail, without quoting the language through which it is expressed. . . .¹

Moby Dick is more than a novel; although no one has questioned the accuracy of the factual basis, there is much more than the external suggestions of realism can convey.² In the manner of projection of the story and its philosophy is found the style for which Melville had sought before, but which in the writing of this book he truly mastered.

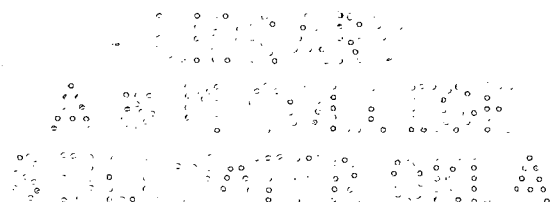
↓ Moby Dick has been spoken of as "a poetic epic."³ Behind this statement lies the fact that in Moby Dick there are many styles not the least of which is prose which in actual rhythm and intensity approaches verse. Experiments have been made in transposing passages of Melville's prose into free verse; often in more regularly rhythmized passages one can scan a kind of broken blank verse. (Recently a cantata has been composed by Bernard Herman, the theme of which is the story of Moby Dick; the libretto, arranged by Vernon Harrington, was taken directly from the original prose and dialogue with only slight alterations, which consisted mostly in selective cutting.)

Melville does not attempt to sustain this poetic mood throughout the whole narrative; the form of his writing creates its own pattern, and it is also the often unusual form which makes credible the devious symbols and creates the passionate

¹ Lewis Mumford, op. cit., p. 159.

² Ibid., pp. 178-180.

³ Ibid., p. 181.



intensity necessary to the total effect. Mumford compares Moby Dick to a symphony:

Every resource of language and thought, fantasy, description, philosophy, natural history, drama, broken rhythms, blank verse, imagery, symbol, are utilized to sustain and expand the great theme. . . .
 . . . Here are Webster's wild violin, Marlowe's cymbals, Browne's sonorous bass viol, Swift's brass, Smollett's castanets, Shelley's flute, brought together in a single orchestra, complementing each other in a grand symphony. Melville achieved a similar synthesis in thought; and that work has proved all the more credible because he achieved it in language, too.¹

Moby Dick has been variously interpreted; the men who interpret it read into its allegory the experiences of life as they have seen it, or attempt to see in it the symbol of Melville's life. (It has been called the battle between man and his abstract intellect, between property and vested privilege and the spirit of man, between man and the elements of nature, between man and the unconscious. Ahab is, of course, the protagonist; the whale his foe. It is primarily the story of the sea and the men who go down to it; it is the record of a vanishing occupation.) For deeper meaning than this, one must search Melville's philosophy. Since the problem of good and evil occupied him the greater part of his life, it is not unlikely that Mumford has the solution when he says:

It is, fundamentally, a parable on the mystery of evil and the accidental malice of the universe. . . . Evil arises with the good. . . .²

At the same time, there is Melville's own statement:

¹

Ibid., pp. 182-183.

²

Ibid., p. 184.

That mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her seas; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous slavish shore . . . better it is to perish in the howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety.¹

Ahab, he says, is the "atheistical captain of the tormented soul."

The conception of Melville was utterly ignored by most of his contemporaries. It was described by the friendly Literary World, edited by Duyckinck, as "an intellectual chowder of romance, philosophy, natural history, fine writing, bad sayings"; and by the Dublin University Magazine as "quite as eccentric in many of its incidents as even Mardi"; but . . . a very valuable book, on account of the unparalleled mass of information. . . ."² Pierre was published the next year, 1852, and was a complete failure, bringing forth more abuse than had ever before been directed at Melville. The following year, with the disastrous fire which destroyed the stock of Melville's books stored at Harper's, marks the beginning of the long years of unpopularity which finally caused Melville to give up a serious career of letters.

Having delivered himself of Moby Dick, a "wicked book" Melville calls it, he seems to have reached the apex of literary achievement. He had gone through severe physical and mental torture while writing it. The record of this strain he left in his letters to Hawthorne, to whom he poured out his

¹ Moby Dick, p. 823.

² Quoted by Minnigerode, op. cit., p. 159.

feelings. His letters to his publisher are, on the other hand, charming and humorous, although he refers frequently to his failing eyesight:

I only wish that I had more day-time to spend out in the day; but like an owl I steal about by twilight, owing to the twilight of my eyes. . . .¹

Melville himself felt that he had outdone himself, and the obtuseness of his public must have irritated him and increased his contempt for the world. In Pierre he says, ". . . though the world worship mediocrity and commonplace, yet it hath fire and sword for contemporary grandeur." When he wrote this book, he was in a mood of both defeat and defiance. The style of the novel is an obvious degeneration; the plot is forced and melodramatic. There are most of the varieties of Moby Dick without the synthesis of the latter. Pierre is Melville's only attempt to treat the problem of sex, and some critics have worked psychological problems into the context to explain the stylistic errors.

Whether Melville was led into excessive rhythm by his own experiments in verse or by the subject matter which he chose or whether he was influenced by German mysticism, transcendentalism, or the style of some other writer is a problem which years of research have not solved, but one cannot feel that this change of style was due entirely to mere carelessness. The writing is too deliberately as it is--too consistently at fault--to be the result of slipshod authorship. It seems likely that Melville was again striving for a means

¹Ibid., p. 73.

of expression which for some reason failed utterly as far as ordinary comprehension is concerned. There are many fine passages to be found, but these only show up the stylistic disease into which Melville had fallen.

Paralleling this degeneration in style is the falling off of Melville's production. In December, 1850, he had complained that he had material for fifty books could he but find time to think them out separately. The most obvious reason for his silence was his ill-health. Melville's physical power seems to have counted a great deal for his work. For several years his only writing consisted of short stories and sketches: mediocre anecdotes, discursive essays, symbolic tales, most of which are very weak.¹ Some, however, show flashes of the old Melville.

One of the most skillful of Melville's short stories is Benito Cereno, which is to his short stories what Moby Dick is to the longer novels. Also interesting are some of the sketches from a group called The Encantadas, still indicative of Melville's descriptive power. Yvor Winters, in an analysis of Melville's works,² places Melville's best work after, or rather following and including, Moby Dick, but this is a rather unusual critical view.

As the product of the man who wrote Moby Dick, all of his writing is of interest; and probably in all of it, one would find something of the qualities which make his prose

¹ Lewis Mumford, op. cit., p. 236.

² Yvor Winters, Maule's Curse, p. 76.

essentially an original and powerful invention.

Regarding Melville's later life, Weaver says,

Melville's longenity has done deep harm to his reputation as an artist in dying, and has obscured the phenomenal brilliancy of his early accomplishment. The last forty years of his history are a record of a stoical -- and sometimes frenzied -- distaste for life, a perverse and sedulous contempt for recognition, an interest in solitude, in etchings, and in metaphysics¹

He died September 28, 1891, at the age of seventy, and the literary journal of the day, The Critic, did not even know who he was.² But Mumford concludes:

Whatever Melville's life was, his art in Moby Dick exhibits that integration and synthesis which we seek. Through his art, he escaped the barren destiny of his living: He embraced Life.³

¹Raymond Weaver, op. cit., p. 16.

²Lewis Mumford, op. cit., p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 368.

CHAPTER III

THE TOOLS OF A STYLE

There are qualities of style which cannot be added to writing, which grow directly from the mind of the author and are due to a combination of imagination and accuracy of observation and expression; but writing is, after all, the transference of thought and emotion by perceptible means, namely, by words and phrase and sequence of parts; hence, various stylistic devices are tangible aspects once they are definitely set into place by the writer, and as such may be treated fairly objectively. It is understood, of course, that the elements of a style do not take shape chronologically in the order in which they finally appear; but in this particular phase of analysis, the materials are discussed as they appear in the finished product.

Aside from rhythm of the syllables and the tone color of individual vowels and consonants, the basis of any style is diction or the choice of words and the order in which they are placed. Just as is true of any device, (there is danger of the use of words for the pure pleasure of words) just as such; and as early as the sixteenth century, one finds a self-conscious development of vocabulary, resulting in "aureation" or the use of words as a sort of gilding process.¹

One cannot read into any of Melville's works very many pages without realizing the extreme variety of the vocabulary,

¹ George Saintsbury, A History of English Prose Rhythm, p. 111.

and more particularly, the frequent use of obvious Latinisms. These Latin derivatives, however, are mixed with equally obvious colloquial terms, so that the only consistent principle seems to be variety in the word-stock. There is, in spite of this, a sense of order about Melville's sentences which shows that actually he selected and disposed his vocabulary with great alertness, and did not use the Latinisms as ornament entirely.

Melville evidently was fond of polysyllabic words, and he used them with a peculiarly distinctive stylistic effect. Even in the comparatively simple prose of Typee and Omoo, one finds a liberal sprinkling of Latinisms. These words add to the verbal melody of the prose and are often used for a humorous effect.

It was undoubtedly this vocabulary which caused critics to ascribe the authorship of Typee and Omoo to "an educated literary man" rather than the "poor outcast working seaman" of the story.¹ The Latinisms are not confined to philosophical digressions, but are used with as great frequency in description and narration. A paragraph of a hundred words chosen at random from Typee contained approximately thirty-percent classical-derivatives; the average is probably lower because of the pile-up of common native words in long strips of prose.

It is not so much the number of Latinisms as it is the peculiar effect of uncommon words in an otherwise simple

¹ Quoted from the London Times, by Minnigerode, op. cit., p. 108.

narrative which makes the use of these classic derivatives outstanding. For example, Melville and Toby perform their "ablutions" in a stream, and they descend into a valley "hemmed in by steep acclivities, which . . . formed an abrupt and semicircular termination of grassy cliffs and precipices." These expressions give the style a slightly pedantic flavor: "a certain feeling of trepidation," "the residue of my downward progress," "our panegyrics were somewhat laconic," "congeniality of sentiment," "take umbrage at," and dozens of similar phrases. The word "oleaginous" is a favorite of Melville's; he applies it to a great variety of things from coffee to weather. This word-choice is one of the sources of the striking epithets which Melville hits off: "amphibious rabble" (the native boys and girls), "lachrymose infant" (one of the native gods).

In his personal letters, Melville frequently slips into similar phrases, and in Mardi, he refers to the fact that his shipmates usually conferred upon him "a sort of drawing room title"; not because he was in any way inclined to squeamishness or a "Chesterfieldian mince," but because he was unable to hide his difference of background. The fact would come "stealing out in an occasional polysyllable; an otherwise incomprehensible deliberation in dining; remote, unguarded allusions to Belles-Lettres affairs; and in other trifles too superfluous to mention."¹ His granddaughter remembers, also, that he used words which seemed queer to her as a child; however,

¹Mardi, p. 386. The novels referred to in this manner are found in Romances of Herman Melville. The pages in this volumes are numbered consecutively.

the example given, "cop" for policeman,¹ is evidence of the equal predilection for what might be called slang, or at least colloquial expressions, in his writing.

Saintsbury points out that an intellectual vocabulary may furnish agreeable relief to the appeal of the purely sensuous elements in words,² and it does appear that Melville distributed his words with an eye to the possible effect, or it may be that in searching for a synonym, he happened to choose a Latin equivalent to serve as a contrast. In Omoo, more definitely humorous in tone than Typee, the effect is undoubtedly as laughter-provoking as shallow pretentiousness usually is. The island physician appeared

. . .so absorbed in the business of locomotion, that he heeded not the imprudence of being in a hurry in a tropical climate.³

The humor lies as much in the choice of words and in the phrasing as in the meaning involved.

Melville often selected verbs which are especially graphic because they are derived from nouns of fairly specific meaning: "heights that environed the vale," "I was inducted into a wretched 'bunk,'" "rendezvousing," "limboed," "embayed waters," "desponded." This practice is not overdone in the early books; in fact it adds to the freshness of expression, but in Pierre, as Forsythe points out, Melville used words which are probably

¹

Raymond Weaver, op. cit., p. 378.

²George Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 303.

³Omoo, p. 299.

original and which are often awkward and cacophonous.¹

Compound adjectives are quite frequent in Moby Dick and Pierre; the early books, however, are almost free of them. Since Mardi is in so many respects fantastic, one finds that the vocabulary has unusual elements also. Occasionally there are jaw-fillers such as "tri-trebley-tri-triply," but these extremely elaborate forms are rare. In Pierre the compound word occurs with irritating regularity: "bravado-hero," "day-doers," "winter-overtaken plant."

A characteristic of the ornamented style of Melville is his tendency to use multiple adjectives and synonyms. This device is noticed in Mardi, but only occasionally. There is also evidence of the device of listing or cataloguing articles, typical of the later style:

. . . rusty old bell-buttons, gangrened copper bolts, and sheathing nails; damp, greenish Carolus dollars (true coin all), besides, divers iron screws, and battered chisels, and belaying pins.²

She pilfered whatever came handy: --iron hooks, dollars, bolts, hatchets, and stopping not at balls of marline and sheets of copper.³

. . . all and sundry those vegetable pills, potions, powders, aperients, purgatives, expellatives, evacuates, tonics, emetics, cathartics, clysters, injections, sacrificers, cataplasms, lenitives, lotions, decoctions, washes, gargles, and phlegmagogues; together with all the jars, calabashes,⁴ gourds, and galipots, thereunto pertaining. . . .

¹ Herman Melville, Pierre, Robert W. Forsythe's Introduction, p. xxxv.

² Mardi, p. 410.

³ Ibid, p. 421.

⁴ Ibid, p. 699.

These "catalogues" and those in White Jacket grow out of the context in a logical manner; that is, the list is not forced, but advantage is taken of the occasion to elaborate in detail instead of mentioning only a few articles:

Now gregoes, pea jackets, monkey jackets, reefing jackets, storm jackets, oil jackets, paint jackets, round jackets, short jackets, long jackets, and all manner of jackets, are the order of the day¹

This is the time for oil-skin suits, dread-naughts, tarred trousers, and overalls, sea-boots, comforters, mittens, woolen socks, Guernsey frocks, Havre shirts, buffalo-robe shirts, and moose-skin drawers.²

The double and triple adjectives found in Mardi are much more insistently used in White Jacket and Moby Dick, and frequently one finds more than three adjectives. Some examples from White Jacket are: "a tall, lank cadaverous young man"; "my grandfather's gallant, gable-ended cocked hat"; "his gallant, off-handed, confident manner"; and from Moby Dick: "a boggy, squitchy picture truly"; "indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity"; "long, low, shelf-like table"; "villanous green goggling glasses." Some of the more extreme examples are: "warmly cool, clear, ringing, perfumed, overflowing, redundant days"; "sundry lazy, ne'er-do-well, unprofitable, and abominable chummies"; "withered, shrunken, one-eyed, toothless, hairless Cuticle."

Along with the use of multiple adjectives is found a corresponding use of synonymous nouns, and even synonymous verbs

¹White Jacket, p. 1169.

²Loc. cit.

in a few passages. Examples of the nouns have been given as "catalogues," and the following are also typical: "numerous little chapels, alcoves, niches, and altars," and "all honorable respectable toils, trials, and tribulations." An illustration of multiple verb usage, also found in White Jacket, is, "The ship's bows were now butting, battering, ramming, and thundering over and upon the head seas. . . ." and from Mardi, "very hard to overcome, cajole, or circumvent."

Melville is usually consistent in adapting the diction of the dialogue to the character of the speakers. Naturally, the vocabulary of the sailors is full of nautical terms and picturesque slang, just as the speech of the Polynesians is a typical mixture of native words and broken English. The language of the characters of Mardi is, to be sure, often oratorical or even poetic, and that of the half-mad philosopher often turns to gibberish. However, these instances are unusual, and ordinarily the dialogue is plausible, if not easy and natural. There are in Moby Dick, as Weaver says

. . . long dialogues and soliloquies such as were never spoken by mortal man in his waking senses, conversations that for sweetness, strength and courage remind one of passages from Dekker, Webster, Massinger, Fletcher and the other old dramatists loved both by Melville and by Charles Lamb. . . .¹

But these are fully prepared for and in keeping with the drama of which they are a part. The dialogue of Pierre is very unusual, particularly the "thee" and "thou" address used by the main characters, but it will be discussed elsewhere in more detail.

¹Raymond Weaver, op. cit., p. 27.

Regarding Polynesian words there is a note in the Preface to Typee:

Except in those cases where the spelling has been previously determined by others--that form of orthography has been employed, which might be supposed most easily to convey their sound to a stranger.¹

Melville's orthography appears to be an attempt at phonetic transcription (on the basis of the Continental vowel-system). The word "typee" or cannibal is spelled "taipi" usually and Nukuheva, the island of the Typees, "Nukahiva." However, there is only enough of the Polynesian language used to carry out the romantic theme, and any important ideas are conveyed by Melville in a convenient translation. The native words for food and clothing: "amar," "poe-e-poe-e," "koko," (principal dishes) "arva," (native liquor) are defined as they are used.

It is evident that Melville had some knowledge of linguistics or that he had studied the matter after returning home, for he notes the intricacies of the dialects and contrasts the labial melody of the girls, "giving a musical prolongation to the final syllable of every sentence," and the more "guttural" articulation of the men, who, when excited, "would work themselves up into a sort of wordy paroxysm, during which all descriptions of rough-sided sounds were projected from their mouths."²

¹ Preface to Typee, op. cit., p. 3.

² Typee, p. 157.

Robert Louis Stevenson, otherwise an admirer of Melville, objected to his rendering of the Polynesian speech,¹ not taking into account that the faults are probably due to unsuccessful orthography than to actual misrepresentation of sound. Mumford refutes Stevenson's idea, saying that "Melville had a curiously accurate ear. . . ." and citing a passage from Omoo, which is one of the earliest records in literature of the modern Cockney as opposed to the earlier urban dialect.²

Flash Jack crosses the forecastle, tin can in hand, and seats himself beside the landlubber.

"Hard fare this, Ropey," he begins; "hard enough, for them that's known better and lived in Lunnun. I say now, Ropey, s'posing you were back to Holborn this morning, what would you have for breakfast, eh?"

"Have for breakfast!" cried Ropey, in a rapture. "Don't speak of it!"

"What ails the fellow?" here growled an old sea-bear, turning round savagely.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," said Jack; and then, leaning over to Rope Yarn, he bade him go on, but speak lower.

"Well, then," said he, in a smugged tone, his eyes lighting up like two lanterns, "well, then, I'd go to Mother Moll's that makes the great muffins: I'd go there, you know, and cock my foot on the 'ob, and call for a noggin o' somethink to begin with."

"And what then, Ropey?"

"Why then, Flashy," continued the poor victim, unconsciously warming with his theme: "why then, I'd draw my chair up and call for Betty, the gal wot tends to customers. Betty, my dear, says I, you looks charmin' this mornin'; give me a nice rasher of bacon and h'eggs, Betty my love; and I wants a pint of h'ale, and three nice hot muffins and butter -- and a slice of Chesire; and Betty, I wants --"

"A shark-steak, and be hanged to you!" roared Black Dan, with an oath. Whereupon, dragged over the chests, the ill-starred fellow is pummelled on deck.³

¹Lewis Mumford, op. cit., p. 82.

²Loc. cit.

³Omoo, pp. 221-222.

The felicity of the rendering of sailors' dialogue points not only to Melville's skill in presenting life and character, but also to a keen ear for speech-sounds which underlies his uncanny ability in his mature prose to establish a marvelous relationship between sound and content which is far beyond that of the ordinary prose style.

One might note in passing, however, that Melville was notoriously a bad speller; he calls attention to the fact in his letters, having difficulty with daguerreotype (he spelled it "Dagreutype") -- "what a devil of an unspellable word," -- and queue ("que") in another instance.¹ His poor eye-sight made it impossible for him to proof-read carefully, which also partly accounts for the many errors found in his later books. A parallel circumstance is related in Pierre; Melville says that the young author corrected the worst errors and let the rest go, "jeering with himself at the rich harvest thus furnished to the entomological [sic] critics."

In White Jacket and Moby Dick, the words seem an inevitable part of the manner of expression. The variety of word-length adds to the rhythm and provides the reinforcement of "beautiful words" of which Saintsbury speaks: "those words which at once force color and outline on the mind's eye, sound and echo on the mind's ear."² The latter

¹ Quoted by Minnigerode, op. cit., pp. 72-73, 51.

² George Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 290.

book makes use of the stately Quaker idiom of the Nantucket seamen, and the dialogue is flavored with Biblical quotations.

Important as words are in defining style, the manner in which these words are put together is a much more definite and personal characteristic. Anyone can use words; it is the manner of combination which is in a sense original and therefore difficult to isolate. Melville's individuality of expression is apparent in all of his books, and is in its most finished form in Moby Dick, where all of the elements of his style exist for once in a perfected blend. This manner can hardly be explained as due to a certain type of sentence structure, for it is more often the result of the words chosen and what is certainly not a conventional and wholly standardized idiom. There is something of the oratorical manner in the turn of phrase, yet this quality, which would be a drawback in an ordinary style, is used effectively by Melville.

Perhaps what enabled him to overcome all expected handicaps is the humor which is never long absent from his pages, although it becomes more sardonic later. Weaver says:

When Melville sat down to write, always at his knee stood that chosen emissary of Satan, the comic spirit; a demoniac never long absent from his pages.¹

Without the spirit of mocking laughter, Melville's tendency

¹ Raymond Weaver, op. cit., p. 27.

toward the inflated and verbose would seem just that, and while the theory may never have been advanced, it seems possible that the later degeneration of his style was due in part to his taking himself and his writing too seriously.

As another stylistic advantage, the first person narrative was retained by Melville until he wrote Pierre. As Henry James points out somewhere, this "double privilege of being at once subject and object" removes many difficulties in writing. Melville by no means attempted to sustain a conversational style, a style which would have excluded elaborate embellishment, but he allowed himself a management of emphasis, a deliberate pointing out of meaning; and by creating an illusion of reality through the first person, he was able to excuse himself for his digressions, to attempt to convince the reader of his beliefs, to fling out his rhetorical questions, all the while availing himself of the aesthetic advantages of an ornate style.

~~X~~ For the most part, Melville avoided short sentences, using those of considerable length and complexity; and his punctuation often appears to follow a method all his own. The construction of the sentences is both periodic and loose, but the cumulative series of clauses is found more frequently than the balanced sentence. ~~X~~ A frequent device is what appears to be a periodic sentence with a final modifier tacked on.

~~X~~ The length and complexity of the sentences increases in Moby Dick, yet clarity is retained to an unusual degree.

The piling of clauses and modifiers adds to the rhythmic nature of the sentences, and in the more sonorous passages, there is more than a trace of Hebrew parallelism:

For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it. Merchant ships are but extension bridges; armed ones but floating forts; even pirates and privateers, though following the sea as highwaymen the road, they but plunder the other ships, other fragments of the land like themselves, without seeking to draw their living from the bottomless deep itself. The Nantucketer, he alone resides and riots on the sea; he alone, in Bible language, goes down to it in ships; to and fro ploughing it as his own special plantation. There is his home; there lies his business, which a Noah's flood would not interrupt, though it overwhelmed all the millions in China.¹

Melville's sentences are sufficiently varied in length and composition to avoid monotony of rhythm or jerkiness.)

Those in Mardi are unusual in their extreme variety, ranging from fragments and very short sentences to lengthy periods. Often the natural word order is ignored completely for stylistic effect, and the prose is almost poetic in the willful distortion alone:

Slowly wore out the night. But when uprose the sun, fled clouds, and fled sadness.²

There is no inversion of this sort in the first part of Mardi, however, but the style follows the story -- the more fantastic the story, the farther from the normal is the prose. In the last two-thirds of the book, the effect of the sentences is one of rapid movement, for when the sen-

¹Moby Dick, p. 797.

²Mardi, p. 690.

tences are not short, the clauses are, so that much the same rhythmical effect is retained. The sentences tend to periodic order, many of which are metered prose:

In the verdant glen of Ardeir, far in the silent interior of Amma, shut in by hoar old cliffs, Yillah the maiden abode.¹

In Redburn, none of this inversion, which was with Melville apparently a deliberate attempt to fix attention, and often irksome and clumsy in effect, is apparent. The sentences are almost consistently long, although there are occasional short clauses. There is a general quietness of tone which is the result of the regular rise and fall of direct and simple prose. The whole is done in a reminiscent manner which suits the subject and makes the graphic descriptions and narrative as imaginative in their way as is the more elaborate style which intensifies the mystic qualities of Moby Dick.

In White Jacket and Moby Dick, except that the latter makes more frequent use of cumulative clauses, there is a skillful blending of sentences of varied length and order. The choppy effect of Mardi is used only for special parts where such movement is in harmony with the content. Toward the end of Moby Dick periodic sentences become more frequent, and the whole style becomes a more precise instrument of expression:

Almost simultaneously, with a mighty volition of un-graduated, instantaneous swiftness, the White Whale

¹Mardi, p. 462.

darted through the weltering sea. But when Ahab cried out to the steersman to take new turns with the line, and hold it so; and commanded the crew to turn round on their seats, and tow the boat up to the mark; the moment the treacherous line felt that double strain and tug, it snapped in the empty air!¹

How effect a cumulative structure can be one can see from the effect of the pile up of clauses in the following sentence, which one sees almost at the end of the book:

But as the last whelmings intermixingly poured themselves over the sunken head of the Indian at the main-mast, leaving a few inches of the erect spar yet visible, together with long streaming yards of the flag, which calmly undulated, with ironical coincidings, over the destroying billows they almost touched; --at that instant a red arm and a hammer hovered backwardly uplifted in the open air, in the act of nailing the flag faster and yet faster to the subsiding spar.²

Paragraphing is not so arbitrarily manipulated as a stylistic device by Melville as is the sentence, but his paragraphs are often effective. There is as great variation in paragraph length as in sentence length, perhaps more. Some extend three or four hundred words; others are as short as two words or a single exclamation. Of course, dialogue determines the paragraphing to a certain extent, but there are some conversations in which the speaker continues for hundreds of words without a break. These are the exception, however, for in normal passages the speeches are of ordinary length.

Sometimes Melville paragraphs simply for the purpose of emphasis. This is a frequent device in Mardi, but there

¹Moby Dick, p. 1100.

²Ibid., pp. 1101-1102.

remain many long paragraphs also. The internal structure of the paragraph usually determines its length, and the choppy paragraphing of Mardi is hardly typical of the style as a whole. In rapid narrative the practice is to let the paragraph run to considerable length, from a hundred to two hundred words, perhaps, then to alternate with a shorter paragraph; or sometimes there may be several long paragraphs before a break will occur. In narrative, of course, the order tends to be chronological, but in descriptive or discursive passages, it may be climactic or cumulative, or there may be a rising and falling effect dependent on the rhythm of the sentences.

Considering the variety of material in Melville's novels, one recognizes the synthesis which he achieved as the result of skillful blending of many parts. The narrative furnishes the thread upon which are strung the many digressions, natural historical, philosophical, the long dialogues and soliloquies, and a great many passages of purely personal comment or imaginative reverie. At first the connection is made obviously, the author calling attention to the nature of the digression, often giving the source in case of historical material; then the discursive habit ceases to be a mere dragging in of extraneous matter, and the "digressions" become an inextricable part of the whole. The use of what might be called the panoramic point of view enabled Melville to prolong the illustration and description without confusion.

X The distinction between narrative and background material is usually made apparent by the chapter division, although sometimes the logical connection between the two makes this unnecessary. The varied nature of the subject matter is indicated to some extent by the number of chapters in Melville's books. In Mardi (363 pages) there are one hundred ninety-five; in Moby Dick (353 pages), one hundred thirty-five. Typee, a much shorter book, (174 pages), has thirty-four; Omoo (274 pages), has eighty-two. Since the chapters in Typee are consistently longer, it seems probable that the short chapter was a later development. In Pierre Melville evidently tried to avoid this multiplicity of chapter by dividing the novel into twenty-six books, which are in turn subdivided.

(One of the most unusual of Melville's devices is the introduction of the dramatic scene into the novel. Directly connected with this is the use of the soliloquy, which is an aspect of the influence of Shakespeare on Melville.) The soliloquy, in its strictly dramatic form, appears only in Moby Dick, but in Mardi and White Jacket there are passages in a discursive vein which might be construed as soliloquies. The dramatic sketch occurs in both Mardi and Moby Dick, but there are scenes in all of the novels which are like dramatic sketches in the scarcity of the supporting material and the dependence upon dialogue for progression of action. In Mardi there are also long philosophical dialogues, remotely resembling the Platonic form.

X In Moby Dick, particularly notable are the several scenes presented in exact dramatic form, setting and directions being

given parenthetically, the speakers designated. The sequence of chapters entitled "Sunset," "Dusk," and "First Night Watch" contain the soliloquies of Ahab, Starbuck, and Stubb, each in a characteristic mood. The contrast of character is perfectly worked out: Ahab, despairing yet unswerving in his monomania; Starbuck, representing the Calvinistic doctrine, bound to obey the man he both hates and pities; and Stubb, believing in predestination of a different sort; colloquial, slangy, yet a philosopher at heart:

I know not all that may be coming, but be it what it will, I'll go to it laughing.¹

Preceding and following these soliloquies are two chapters which might be matched with any drama for intensity. The first is the scene of the quarter-deck in which Ahab wins the men over to his chase. There is more comment and setting in this scene than in the following chapters, but no more than one finds in a Barrie play. In the chapter "Midnight, Fore-castle" the speakers are simply designated and their positions indicated:

Foresail rises and discovers the watch standing, lounging, leaning, and lying in various attitudes, all singing in chorus.²

The sailors sing and dance, laughing and joking; various nationalities are indicated by the speech and attitude of each sailor who speaks. The scene starts in a rollicking mood, but as a storm springs up, the atmosphere becomes tense, and

¹

Moby Dick, p. 861.

²

Loc. cit.,

a fight is avoided only by the mate ordering all aloft. The transition back to the narrative is made in the next chapter in a very neat manner:

I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs....¹

While the story of the three-day whale hunt is not in this dramatic form, it is probably one of the most dramatic passages in literature. The intensity heightens gradually from the moment Moby Dick is first sighted and is increased by the use of symbols throughout the book, so that there is an impressive combination of spiritual and physical adventure which makes the book a successful blending of forms and subject whether it utilizes the qualities of a novel, a tragic drama, or an epic poem.²

Many critics have commented upon the magnificent opening line of Moby Dick without noting the fact that most of Melville's other books have direct beginnings which are almost as skillful as the paragraph from Moby Dick beginning "Call me Ishmael." The usual device is that of plunging right into the narrative, so that the reader feels immediately that he is in the confidence of the narrator as the scene is set. Take the beginning of Typee: "Six months at sea!", followed by the clever treatment of the sorry state of the provisions on board and the charming conception of the land-sick ship. No wonder the prospect of the Marquesas was a delightful one.

¹ Moby Dick, p. 866.

² Yvor Winters, op. cit., p. 75.

Omoo takes up the story exactly where Typee left it:

It was in the middle of a bright tropical afternoon that we made good our escape from the bay.¹

The rapid, somewhat erratic course of Mardi is set by the opening sentence: "We are off!", and in its way, the opening paragraph is quite good for the purpose of setting the stage:

The courses and topsails are set: the coral-hung anchor swings from the bow: and together, the three royals are given to the breeze, that follows us out to sea like the baying of a hound. Out spreads the canvas--alow, aloft--boom stretched, on both sides, with many a stun' sail; till like a hawk, with pinions poised, we shadow the sea with our sails, and reelingly cleave the brine.²

Melville's habit of alluding to what will follow, a practice which he continues throughout his books, is seen in the opening of White Jacket, already cited as an indication of the jovial mood of the book.³ Redburn starts with the eve of the departure for New York with Redburn's brother giving him a hunting jacket; then the story goes back to pick up the imaginative background which Redburn had been building up for himself and which was to be ruthlessly destroyed by his subsequent experiences. As complete biographies, Pierre and Israel Potter begin and move more slowly.

Beginning with Mardi, Melville seems to have become more and more a conscious stylist. A part of this deliberate manner is his use of symbolism and fate. The symbolism in Mardi is largely artificial: flowers, signs; the number three, used

¹Omoo, p. 193.

²Mardi, p. 379.

³Chapter II, p. 27.

in countless ways; place names: "Isle of Nods"--the home of dreamers, hypochondriacs, somnambulists--"House of Morning," "House of Afternoon," "Land of Shades," "Land of the Warwicks or Kingmakers"; and the allegorical significance of the characters themselves to a certain extent. In White Jacket, the jacket makes Melville conspicuous and the butt of jokes. To him it takes on a malignant personality, bent on his destruction. Only when he falls from the main-mast into the ocean, does he manage to free himself once and for all from the jacket which was almost his shroud. The jacket, however, is only a minor part of the story, as is the guide book in Redburn, symbol of the worthlessness of his ideals. In both books, these "symbols" only serve to highlight the narrative, for the books are comparatively free from hidden meanings.

~~X~~ In Moby Dick, however, Melville's symbolism appears again and again, and in a more vital form. The very name of the narrator, Ishmael, sets the background, and there are other names of Biblical significance: Ahab, the mad captain, whose mother had named him after the wicked king, and of whom it was foretold that the name would prove prophetic; Elijah, who gives the warning as the ship is preparing to leave port; even the name of the ship which rescued Ishmael, the Rachel.

The symbolism appears particularly in connection with Fate. The whole theme is interwoven with the Calvinistic doctrines, but Melville placed dark omens in the path of Ishmael as he set out on his voyage: the dreary streets through

which he stumbles; the Negro church; the mysterious picture on the wall of the inn; the name of the inn and of its proprietor: "Spouter Inn, Peter Coffin." The visit to the whalesmen's chapel adds to the setting, and Ishmael himself begins to ponder the signs when he sees the enormous black pots hanging from the topmast planted in the doorway of the inn at Nantucket--"here a gallows! and a pair of prodigious black pots too! Are these last throwing out oblique hints touching Tophet?"¹

XThese and others are external evidences of impending tragedy. The winds were always contrary to the Pequod's course; Ahab even finds himself no longer able to receive consolation in his pipe and throws it over board. He insists "This whole act's immutably decreed. . . . I am Fate's lieutenant; I act under orders." XIn the process of weaving a mat, Ishmael sees the symbol of life itself:

. . . it seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates.²

The danger involved in the whale line which is attached to the harpoon and which often in running out would take off a man's arm if it were not carefully stowed has a broader application:

All men live enveloped in whale lines. All are born with halters around their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, ever-present perils of life.³

¹Moby Dick, p. 798.

²Ibid., p. 888.

³Ibid., p. 930.

Pierre is also full of symbolism, and again, Melville is careful to point out the significance of details which might otherwise pass as merely insignificant. In this book it is more specifically Pierre's fate which is foreshadowed, for there is not the direct application to life which one finds in the allegory of Moby Dick. However, Pierre's life may be seen as evidence of the ambiguity of life in general. Some of the symbols in Pierre are obscure; Forsythe refers to Pierre's statement that Lucy and Isabel are his Good and Bad Angels as having no apparent application to the text,¹ and there are visions of Pierre's which are even more complex. More obvious are the symbols of the two portraits of Pierre's father, one made before, the other after his marriage, the pamphlet of Plotinus Plinlimmon, significant of the necessity of adjusting one's "time-piece" to the world in which one lives, for "God's truth is one thing and man's truth another."

There is very little of the symbolical in Israel Potter, but when Israel changes clothes with a beggar, the act is shown to be symbolic:

Little did he ween that these wretched rags he now wore, were but suitable to that long career of destitution before him: one brief career of adventurous wanderings; and then forty torpid years of pauperism. . . The dress befitted the fate.²

A feature developed in Melville's later work was the unifying theme, a subject more closely related to subject matter, perhaps, than to style, but nevertheless a means to organic

¹Herman Melville, Pierre, Forsythe, op. cit., p. xxxiv.

²Israel Potter, p. 1363.

unity. The two South Sea narratives are almost strictly chronological; Mardi follows a shadowy time scheme although the picture is almost a static one in spite of the appearance of rapid movement.

But in White Jacket there is the recurring difficulty of the jacket, which in an otherwise straightforward narrative gives a note not altogether unlike the dominant motive of Moby Dick, which seems to combine the search of Mardi, with its unreturning wanderer, and symbolism of the malevolent whiteness of the jacket.

Even more obvious in Melville's later style is the elaborate use of allusions and figures of speech. In Typee there are perhaps more allusions than one would expect in normal prose, but considering the elaborate encrusting of the later style, one recognizes that this early phase is fairly simple. Literary allusions are frequent, but those which occur are not out of the ordinary: a reference to Robinson Crusoe's foot-print; the comparison of the aged native physician with Hippocrates; a specimen of tatooing marked as reminiscent of the illustrations in Goldsmith's Animated Nature; Melville with his injured leg carried "like the old man of the sea astride of Sinbad"; a number of Biblical references. There is a sprinkling of historical figures, particularly those associated with the South Seas. The references, however, even this early in Melville's career, show wide reading, and the ease with which the allusions are cast off indicates that this knowledge was readily at his disposal. The figures used are drawn from nature for the most

part, and the quotations and paraphrases which occur at intervals are the obvious ones; the use to which they are put is often humorous. Melville fears that he will be tattooed, to "the utter ruin of his 'face divine,' as the poets call it"; a cat is "the animal that made the fortune of the ex-lord-mayor Whittington." After making a number of derogatory remarks about the effect of Christianity upon the natives of the Sandwich islands, he says:

As wise a man as Shakespeare has said, that the
bearer of evil tidings hath but a losing office;
and so I suppose will it prove with me. . . .¹

Because of the rollicking air of Omoo, or perhaps one should say, adding to the rollicking air, there is more use of irony and hyperbole, as well as an increase in metaphor. The personification of the "Little Jule" is almost poignant:

. . .brave Little Jule, plump Little Jule was a witch.
Blow high, or blow low, she was always ready for the
breeze; and when she dashed the waves from her prow,
you never thought of her patched sails and blistered
hull.²

When her course was suddenly arrested, she "bridled her head like a steed reined in, while the foam flaked under her bows." There are the same types of literary allusions, perhaps occurring less frequently, but comparing the two books, one realizes that there were certain figures which seem to have been favorites of Melville's. Literature is not the only art to which Melville refers, for he mentions Stonehenge, the pyramids, and Caryatides, and also uses musical figures.

¹ Typee, p. 140.

² Omoo, p. 196.

In both of the South Sea narratives, Melville uses source material for a great deal of the historical, geographical, and anthropological data which form a part of his digressions, and he often gives credit for the information. Some of the narratives which he mentions are: Porter's Journal of the Cruise; Stewart's A Visit to the South Seas; Ellis' Polynesian Researches; Cook's Voyages; a chronicle of Mendanna's voyage, kept by Figueroa.

The style of Mardi is not only symbolic and poetic, but also exceedingly figurative. The figures are frequently drawn from nature, although there are many allusions. In the most inventive passages, and those of pure verbal melody, allusions are less frequent than in the ordinary passages of description and illustration. There are chapters, however, which are crammed with allusions and comparisons. These chapters are in the form of digressions; for example, the chapter on dreams, which has no relation to the story; the chapter, "Time and Temples," which is a little essay on the building of great towers and natural monuments, introduced by way of contrast to the description of the palaces of a prince; and the chapter, "Faith and Knowledge," which is an introduction to an incredible story told by one of the characters:

In some universe-old truths, all mankind are disbelievers. Do you believe that you lived three thousand years ago? That you were at the taking of Tyre, were overwhelmed in Gomorrah? No. But for me, I was at the subsiding of the Deluge, and helped swab the ground, and build the first house. With the Israelites, I fainted in the wilderness; was at court, when Solomon outdid all the judges before him. I, it was, who suppressed the lost work of Manetho, on the Egyptian theology, as containing mysteries not to be revealed to posterity, and things at war

with the canonical scriptures; I, who originated the conspiracy against that purple murderer, Domitian; I, who in the senate moved, that great and good Aurelian be emperor. I instigated the abdication of Diocletian, and Charles the Fifth; I touched Isabella's heart, that she hearkened to Columbus. I am he, that from the king's minions hid the Charter in the old oak at Harford; I harbored Goffe and Whalley; I am the leader of the Mohawk masks, who in the Old Commonwealth's harbor, overboard threw the East India Company's Souchong; I am the Veiled Persian Prophet; I, the man in the iron mask; I, Junius.¹

The chapter "Dreams" is little more than a long series of figures and illusions: historical, geographical, literary, even astronomical. The piling up of allusions, illustrations, figurative comparisons, is a favorite rhetorical device of Melville's to increase wonder, and at the same time, to create a sense of inevitable truth. The style of this chapter is typical of the elaborate descriptions of Mardi, although it is an exaggerated version of the general tone, since the allusions and figures are not always so frequent:

Dreams! dreams! passing and repassing, like Oriental empires in history; and scepters wave thick, as Bruce's pikes at Bannockburn; and crowns are plenty as the mari-golds in June. And far in the background, hazy and blue, their steep let down from the sky, loom Andes on Andes, rooted on Alps; and all round me, long rushing oceans, roll Amazons and Oronocos; waves, mounted Parthians; and, to and fro, toss the wide woodlands; all the world an elk, and the forests its antlers.²

The range of allusions is typical; the types of figures common, and the alliteration an ever-present device with Melville.

The manner of expression which underlies this ornament has been called "rhapsodic," and the term is probably as good as any to describe the vibrant emotional quality and rhythmic-

¹Mardi, p. 540.

²Ibid., p. 575.

al nature of Melville's fully developed style. It is this factor, among others, which keeps the so-called ornamental style from assuming a beauty of form and sensation on its own account. There is no doubt, however, that the excessive use of images and allusions is as distinct a type of ornament as painting on a Greek vase, which may be studied in itself or as a contributing factor to the beauty of the form as a whole.

There are probably no figures of speech which Melville does not utilize at some time or in some way in his fully developed style. Often a figure is carried through a whole paragraph as is the comparison of the sharks around a ship when a sea fight is going on with dogs under a table where meat is being served, "ready to bolt down every killed man that is tossed to them";¹ and the repetition of the idea that the land is an "insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy," represents the soul of man, and that the sea, which surrounds it, stands for the horrors "of the half-known life."² The prayer of Father Mapple sounds like the continual tolling of a bell in a ship that is foundering at sea in a fog.³ Personification is almost invariable in the description of the ships, and it carries over into nature description, often resulting in what Ruskin calls the "pathetic fallacy": "unpitying waters," "smiling valleys," "insolent waves." This drawback,

¹Moby Dick, p. 936.

²Ibid., p. 926.

³Ibid., p. 783.

if it is one, is scarcely noticeable in Moby Dick and White Jacket.

The figurative passages occur more frequently as the style becomes more ornate as a whole. The figures are often mingled with complex allusions, but many are based upon commonplace references, such as the following:

The world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.¹

Her venerable bows looked bearded.²

As morning mowers, who side by side slowly and seethingly advance their scythes through the long wet grass of marshy meads; even so these monsters swam, making a strange, grassy, cutting sound; and leaving behind them endless swaths of blue upon the yellow sea.³

Like palls, the clouds swept to and fro, hooding the gibbering winds. At every head-beat wave, our arching prows reared up, and shuddered; the night ran out in rain.⁴

. . . all the East radiant with red burnings, like an altar fire.⁵

. . . my nose against the ceiling, like a dead man's against the lid of his coffin.⁶

As Melville jocularly said once, he had an exceedingly retentive mind, for it is ridiculous to suppose that he deliberately set about looking up all of the figures which he desired to use, however consciously he added them to his style.

¹Moby Dick, p. 782.

²Ibid., p. 800.

³Ibid., p. 925.

⁴Mardi, p. 723.

⁵Ibid., p. 729.

⁶White Jacket, p. 1157.

✓ The material in Moby Dick concerning whales, the outline of a history of cetology, must have required an immense amount of reading, but how long Melville had been at this one does not know, although he mentions his first sight of a whale in Redburn, and he may have seen pictures and read of them even before his first voyage. At the beginning of Moby Dick one finds a long list of passages culled from the most various sources imaginable, beginning with a Biblical quotation:

And God created great whales,
continuing with comments from Pliny, Montaigne, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Spenser, Sir Thomas Browne, Hobbes, Bunyan, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Goldsmith, Burke, Webster, and many others, such as histories of whaling and whaling voyages by authors not well-known; and ending with the whale song:

Oh, the rare old Whale, mid storm and gale,
In his ocean home will be
A giant in might, where night is right,
And king of the boundless sea.

This research Melville attributes to a "poor devil of a Sub-Sub-Librarian," and indicates that it is by no means an adequate cetology, such as he attempts later in the book, but a series of indiscriminate comments which show what many nations and generations have thought of the whale.

This offering of quotations en masse is a device which Melville does not repeat in any of his books, and provided the reader does not skip over it, the effect may be that which Weaver describes.

And extraordinarily effective is this device of Melville's in stirring the reader's interest to a sense of the wonder and mystery of this largest of all

created things. . . . Even before the reader comes to the superb opening paragraph of Moby Dick the flood gates of the wonder world are swung open. . . .¹

There are many other quotations and allusions scattered throughout the book, particularly in the chapters on cetology.

Of this deliberate searching for material there is little evidence in White Jacket, for the allusions are not far-fetched nor unusual, but seem to be the natural result of image-making. Melville describes the making of his jacket by cutting a shirt down the front:

The gash being made, a metamorphosis took place, transcending any related by Ovid. For, presto! the shirt was a coat!--a strange-looking coat, to be sure; of a Quakerish amplitude about the skirts; with an infirm, tumble-down collar; and a clumsy fullness about the wristbands; and white, yea, white as a shroud.²

The transition from "metamorphosis" to Ovid is not a strange one; the resemblance to the Quaker frock would naturally be noticed by Melville who had spent a good part of his life among the Quakers; and the shroud is, of course, a common figure, almost hackneyed. The rest of the description is typical of the use of figures and allusions for graphic imagery and humor:

. . . I bedarned and bequilted the inside of my jacket, till it became, all over, stiff and padded, a King James's cotton-stuffed and dagger-proof doublet; and no buckram or steel hauberk stood up more stoutly. . . . Waterproof it was no more than a sponge. Indeed, with such recklessness had I bequilted my jacket that in a rainstorm I became a universal absorber; swabbing bone-dry the very bulwarks I leaned against. Of a damp day, my heartless shipmates even used to stand up against me, so powerful was the capillary attraction between this luckless jacket of mine and all

1

Raymond Weaver, op. cit., pp. 134-135.

²White Jacket, p. 1111.

drops of moisture. I dripped like a turkey a' roasting; and long after the rain storms were over, and the sun showed his face, I still stalked a Scotch mist; and when it was fair weather with others, alas! it was foul weather with me.¹

And because he has to go aloft in this wringing-wet jacket, he continues:

And thus, in my own proper person, did many showers of rain reascend toward the skies, in accordance with the natural laws.²

The description of the boat continues in much the same style. The captain in his cabin "sat silent and stately, as the statue of Jupiter in Dodona." As the sailors sprang to the bars to up-anchor, every man was a Goliath, "every tendon a hawser!" and up to the bows came "several thousand pounds of old iron, in the shape of our ponderous anchor."

In sustaining this highly ornamented style, Melville does not avoid repetition of allusions. Yet, considering the hundreds of references made, there are really remarkably few which are obvious repetitions. Some figures seem to be favorites of Melville's, however, and occur several times in one book; but more often the reiteration will be found in another work, such as the allusions to Patagonia, Lacedaemon, Ehrenbreitstein, Tophet, Plato, which are found in several books. The similarity of context sometimes explains the use of the same allusions or figure, or the application may be varied enough that one can hardly say that it is an absolute repetition:

¹Loc. cit.

²Ibid., p. 1112.

. . . like the spines of the three old kings of Cologne.¹

. . . like so many effigies of the Black Prince on his monument in Canterbury Cathedral.²

. . . like the pilgrim-worshipped flag-stone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled.³

. . . even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower.⁴

. . . walls and muzzles of cannoned Ehrenbreitstein. . .⁵

. . . a lofty Ehrenbreitstein, with a perennial well of water within the walls.⁶

Some idea of the great variety of the material used, the way in which it contributes to the imagery, and the almost invariable figurative use of the allusions can be seen by random examples. In the more elaborate passages, these allusions may run the whole gamut of history of some particular reference; one can easily find pages on which there are at least a dozen allusions and figures and hardly a page in either Moby Dick or White Jacket which will be without one of these ornaments. Even the characters add to the wealth of allusion, notable cases being the doctor in Omoo and Jack Chase in White Jacket, who quotes Camoëns and speaks with great familiarity of Homer, Byron, Shelley--"poor lad!

¹Moby Dick, p. 800.

²White Jacket, p. 1142.

³Moby Dick, p. 800.

⁴Ibid., p. 845.

⁵Pierre, p. 77.

⁶Moby Dick, p. 782.

a Percy, too--but they ought to have let him sleep in his sailor's grave--he was drowned in the Mediterranean, you know, near Leghorn-- and not burn his body, as they did, as if he had been a bloody Turk. But many people thought him so, White Jacket, because he didn't go to mass, and because he wrote Queen Mab."¹ This erudite sailor mentions that Camoëns' translator, William Julius Mickle, wrote a ballad (Cumnor Hall) which gave Scott the idea for Kenilworth. He quotes Waller; the Iliad--"Pope's version, sir, not the original"; Macbeth; calls the amateur poet on the ship his "after-guard Virgil." The chaplain of the frigate is also a scholar:

He had drunk at the mystic fountain of Plato; his head had been turned by the Germans; and this I will say, that White Jacket himself saw him with Coleridge's Biographia Literaria in his hand.²

Characteristic of the device of allusions is the tendency to lump similar allusions, or to multiply the comparisons. Often the device is a rhetorical one, the aim of which is to impress the reader. An exaggerated or special case is that of the chapter on "The Whiteness of the Whale," in which all sorts of examples are given of the significance of whiteness. Another is that of the chapter on "masthead standers." The chapter "Dreams" in Mardi is perhaps the most extreme example one could find of multiple allusion:

¹ White Jacket, p. 1270.

² Ibid., p. 1201.

In me, many worthies recline, and converse. I list to St Paul who argues the doubts of Montaigne; Julian the Apostate cross-questions Augustine, and Thomas-a-Kempis unrolls his old black-letters for all to decipher. Zeno murmurs maxims beneath the hoarse shout of Democritus; and though Democritus laughs loud and long, and the sneer of Pyrrho be seen; yet, divine Plato, and Proclus, and Verulam are often my counsel; and Zoroaster whispered me before I was born. I walk a world that is mine; and enter many nations, as Mungo Park rested in African cots; I am served like Bajazet: Bacchus my butler, Virgil my minstrel, Philip Sidney my page. My memory is a life beyond birth; my memory, my library of the Vatican, its alcoves all endless perspectives, eve-tinted by cross-lights from Middle-Age orielis.¹

Other passages offer allusions the sources of which are widely varied:

And perhaps, when those sedative fumes have steeped you in the grandest of reveries, and, circle over circle, solemnly rises some immeasurable dome in you soul--far away, swelling and heaving into the vapour you rise--as if from one of Mozart's grandest marches a temple were rising, like Venus from the sea--at such a time, to have your whole Parthenon tumbled about your ears by the knell of the ship's bell announcing the expiration of the half hour for smoking! Whip me, you furies! toast me in saltpetre! smite me, some thunder-bolt! charge upon me, endless squadrons of Mamalukes! devour me, Feejees! but preserve me from a tyranny like this.²

The following quotations may serve to show how Melville tends to images and figures which are largely based upon his reading. Quite frequent are the literary allusions, which included references to authors, works, and characters as well:

He had read Don Quixote, and instead of curing his Quixotism, as it ought to have done, it only made him still more Quixotic.³

¹Mardi, p. 576.

²White Jacket, p. 1337.

³Ibid., p. 1244.

Perhaps Captain Claret had read the Memoirs of Vidoco, and believed in the old saying, set a rogue to catch a rogue.¹

Shylock must have his pound of flesh.²

His reveries were Manfred-like and exalted, reminiscent of unutterable deeds.³

Be Sir Thomas Browne our ensample; who, while exploding "Vulgar Errors," heartily hugged all the Pentateuch.⁴

The most frequent single source of allusions is the Bible. Again the allusions take various forms; some are remote where the Biblical matter has been woven into the context of the sentences, but there are also many references to Biblical characters, not many of which are obscure.

So at Luz, in his strange vision, Jacob saw the angels.⁵

Notwithstanding the existence of wedlock among the Typees, the scriptural injunction to increase and multiply seems to be but indifferently attended to.⁶

Escaped from the house of bondage, Israel of old did not follow after the ways of the Egyptians. . . . We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people-- the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world.⁷

The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe.⁸

¹White Jacket, p. 1221.

²Ibid., p. 1328.

³Mardi, p. 397.

⁴Ibid., p. 677.

⁵Ibid., p. 399.

⁶Typee, p. 135.

⁷White Jacket, p. 1199.

⁸Moby Dick, p. 1014.

These allusions are often made pointed, as are the phrases of Captain Bildad in Moby Dick:

Something of the salt sea yet lingered in old Bildad's language, heterogeneously mixed with Scriptural and domestic phrases.¹

and the following example from White Jacket:

. . . That great non-combatant, the Bible, assures us that our life is but a vapour, that quickly passeth away.²

Others are not made specific:

The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us.³

. . . that tempestuous wind Euroclydon kept up a worse howling than ever it did about poor Paul's tossed craft.⁴

Also frequent are references to classical literature and mythology:

And when Trojan Aeneas wandered West, and discovered the pleasant land of Latium, it was in the fine craft Bis Taurus he sailed: its stern gloriously emblazoned, its prow a leveled spear.⁵

. . . these thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus make him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart forever; that vulture in the very creature he creates.⁶

This Right Whale I take to have been a Stoic; the Sperm Whale, a Platonian, who might have taken up Spinoza in his latter years.⁷

¹Ibid., p. 813.

²White Jacket, p. 1186.

³Moby Dick, p. 761.

⁴Ibid., p. 764.

⁵Mardi, p. 640.

⁶Moby Dick, p. 881.

⁷Ibid., p. 963.

What befell the weakling youth lifting up the dread goddess's veil at Lais?¹

From an apparent wide and detailed knowledge of history Melville draws many of his allusions and figures:

. . . a disordered flight, as of Cleopatra's barges from Actium.²

It is the world of mind; wherein the wanderer may gaze round, with more wonder than Balboa's band roving through the golden Aztec glades.³

Threatened with the stake, mitred Cranmer recanted; but through her fortitude, the lorn widow of Edessa stayed the tide of Valens' persecutions.⁴

. . . closer than Webster to the Constitution.⁵

I remembered Guy Fawkes and the Parliament house, and made earnest inquiry whether this gunner was a Roman Catholic. I felt relieved when informed that he was not.⁶

Literature is not the only of the arts which serves Melville as source material. He draws figures from all of the fine arts: music, architecture, painting, sculpture, besides alluding to specific examples of each. Melville was a frequent opera-goer, and he describes a character in Mardi as nodding "like the still statue in the opera of Don Juan." He speaks of the musical cadence of the ocean and notes the verbal melody of speech. In several descriptive passages he

¹Ibid., p. 963.

²Ibid., p. 980.

³Mardi, p. 683.

⁴Ibid., p. 395.

⁵Ibid., p. 407.

⁶White Jacket, p. 1185.

uses architectural terms to describe a natural setting. There are frequent allusions to great buildings: St. Peter's, St. Paul's, Canterbury Cathedral, Cologne, the Parthenon, and Stonehenge. Other references are figurative:

Like a Hindu pagoda, this bamboo edifice rose story above story. . . .¹

The firmament arch has no key-stone.²

The monstrous paintings of whales come in for special attention. Melville specifically discusses Hogarth's and Guido's representations of sea-monsters, the possible source of which may be old Hindoo, Egyptian, and Greek sculptures. He refers to the Elgin³ marbles, to the prints of "that fine old Dutch savage, Albert Dürer," and to Michelangelo's mural painting of God the Father in human form on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which he contrasts with the "soft, curled, hermaphroditical Italian pictures."

Figures are drawn from science and mathematics:

Besides this, she carried four boats of an arithmetical progression in point of size. . . .⁴

Astronomical and astrological references are common:

I see the Great Bear now, and the little one, its cub; and Andromeda, and Perseus' chain armor, and Cassiopea in her golden chair, and the bright, scaly Dragon, and the glittering Lyre, and all the jewels in Orion's sword-hilt.⁵

¹Mardi, p. 572.

²Ibid., p. 696.

³Ibid., p. 412.

⁴White Jacket, p. 1204.

⁵Mardi, p. 645.

Who in Arcturus hath heard of us? They know us not in the Milky Way. . . . Could we get to Boötes, we would be no nearer Oro, than now. . . . We must go, and obtain a glimpse of what we are from the Belts of Jupiter and the Moons of Saturn, ere we see ourselves aright.¹

X The soliloquy of Stubb on the signs in the almanac is typical of the frequent use of this sort of allusion for humorous effect:

Signs and wonders, eh? Pity if there is nothing wonderful in signs, and significant in wonders! . . . Your zodiac here is the life of man in one round chapter. . . . To begin: there's Aries, or the Ram--lecherous dog, he begets us; then, Taurus, or the Bull--he bumps us the first thing; then Gemini, or the Twins--that is, Virtue and Vice; we try to reach Virtue, when lo! comes Cancer the Crab, and drags us back; and here, going from Virtue, Leo, a roaring Lion, lies in the path. . . . There's a sermon now, writ in high heaven, and the sun goes through it every year. . . .²

One would expect a traveler such as Melville to be acquainted with various parts of the globe, and he adds to this knowledge historical material for another widely used source of ornament:

In their earthquakes, Lisbon and Lima never saw the like.³

. . . blue lake-like waters, serene as Windermere, or Horicon.⁴

It was a black and hooded head; and hanging there in the midst of so intense a calm, it seemed the Sphinx's in the desert.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 694-696.

²Moby Dick, p. 1019.

³Mardi, p. 676.

⁴Ibid., p. 677.

⁵Moby Dick, p. 947.

. . . like the innermost citadel within the amplified fortifications of Quebec.¹

These practices of elaboration are not peculiar to any group of Melville's works, but can be found in everything he wrote. However, the period generally recognized as his best, that of White Jacket and Moby Dick, is marked, as has been shown, by an increase of elaboration, and moreover, because of the unity of these books and because of the magnificent scheme of the latter, they are considered of greater literary merit than the more carelessly organized Typee and Omoo, and the fantastic Mardi.

Not only are a great many of Melville's sources apparent but it is also evident that Melville was conscious of the elaboration of his style from the remarks which he himself makes occasionally. In Mardi one finds the following sentence:

Besides being pervious to the points of pins, and possessing a palate capable of appreciating plum-puddings:-- which sentence reads off like a pattering of hailstones.²

There is, of course, no contribution aside from the humorous effect of alliteration and the popping sound of "p." In White Jacket he describes one of the young lieutenants:

Was it you, Selvagee! that, outward-bound, off Cape Horn, looked at Hermit Island through an opera-glass? Was it you, who thought of proposing to the captain, that when the sails were furled in a gale, a few drops of lavender should be dropped in their "bunts," so that when the canvas was set again, your nostrils might not be offended by its musty smell? I do not say it was you, Selvagee; I but deferentially inquire.³

¹Ibid., p. 969.

²Mardi, p. 412.

³White Jacket, p. 1128.

Then he says,

In plain prose, Selvagee was one of those officers whom the sight of a trim-fitting naval coat had captivated in the days of his youth.¹

Although many influences can be seen in Melville's style, the finished product is a unique creation. Weaver points out that Melville may have got the idea for the symbolism of mast heads upon which he elaborates in Moby Dick from the Garden of Cyprus of Sir Thomas Browne, in which Browne wrote of

"the Quincuncial Lozenge, or Net-Work Plantation of the Ancients, Artificially, Naturally, Mystically considered," to find, as Coleridge remarks, "quincunxes in tone, in optic nerves, in roots of trees, in leaves, in everything"²

And it may be that Melville was influenced to an extent by the seventeenth century prose masters, for there was a revival of interest in their work during the nineteenth century, when the Romantics turned to the more elaborate prose in revolt against the preciseness of the eighteenth century literature.

Much has been said of the friendship, such as it was, between Hawthorne and Melville, particularly during the period when they lived as neighbors in the Berkshires. Melville thought that he had found in Hawthorne a kindred spirit, but the relationship can only be judged from Melville's letters, since none of Hawthorne's to Melville are available. The Hawthorne household seems to have been very fond of this

¹Ibid., p. 1278.

²Quoted by Weaver, op. cit., p. 146.

strange man, whome they called "Mr. Omoo." Just what the relation between Melville and Hawthorne was, it is hard to discover. It is clear from Melville's letters that he poured forth his deepest feelings to Hawthorne, but as Minnigerode points out, it is unlikely that Hawthorne shared Melville's pagan sensations.¹

The connection with transcendentalism which is apparent in Melville's writing may have been a part of the influence of Hawthorne. Melville admired a great deal of Hawthorne's writing, but in his letters he is the same outspoken critic of Hawthorne that he was of other writers: speaking of the TwiceTold Tales, he says,

Some of these sketches are wonderfully subtle. Their deeper meanings are worthy of a Brahmin. Still there is something lacking--a good deal lacking to the plump sphericality of the man. What is that? He doesn't patronize the butcher--he needs roast-beef, done rare. Nevertheless, for one, I regard Hawthorne (in his books) as evincing a quality of genius immensely lofier, and more profound, too, than any other American has shown hitherto in the printed form.²

Another transcendentalist, Emerson, is mention in a letter. His publisher had evidently mentioned Emerson to Melville, perhaps supposing some indebtedness there. Melville replies:

Nay, I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow, but prefer rather to hang myself in mine own halter than swing in any other man's swing. Yet I think Emerson is more than a brilliant fellow. Be his stuff begged, borrowed, or stolen, or of his own domestic manufacture, he is an uncommon man. Swear he is a humbug--then is he no uncommon humbug; lay it down that had not Sir Thomas Browne lived, Emerson would not have mystified--I will answer that had not Old Zach's father begot him, Old Zach

¹Meade Minnigerode, op. cit., p. 54.

²Quoted by Minnigerode, op. cit., p. 56.

would never have been the hero of Palo Alto. The truth is that we are all sons, grandsons, or nephews or great-nephews of those who go before us. No one is his own sire.¹

These comments are particularly interesting in view of the accusations of critics that Melville himself was influenced by Browne. But Melville never attempted to hide his borrowings; Weaver quotes a passage from The Confidence Man, one of Melville's later Books, in which he says that "quite original" is

a phrase, we fancy, oftener used by the young, or the unlearned, or the untravelled, than by the old, or the well-read, or the man who has made the grand tour.²

Forsythe attributes certain phases of Melville's style and thinking to his contemporaries in England, Carlyle and DeQuincey in particular.³ These influences he applies to Pierre, but Melville exhibited most of the tendencies of Pierre long before the book was written, and if one wishes to blame grammatical eccentricities, verbal compounds, abstract nouns, unconventionality in sentence structure on Carlyle, one may say that the influence was more widespread in Melville's work. If traces of the Suspiria de Profundis are found in Pierre, they are equally evident in Mardi.

One is struck, however, by the fact that large portions of elaborately written prose are concerned with dreams. In writing fantasy, the author often turns to this "super-rhetoric." The dream character impresses itself upon most of

¹Ibid., pp. 32-33.

²Raymond Weaver, op. cit., p. 90.

³Herman Melville, Pierre, Introd. by Forsythe, p. xxxvii.

the prose, and just as the dream floats the dreamer over the most irrational and impossible transition of incident and subject, so the highly rhythmed and elaborately embellished prose carries the reader along.¹

~~X~~ It has been mentioned that the influence of Sir Thomas Browne is one commonly mentioned with regard to Melville's prose style, and it is quite possible that Melville was attracted by the prose of the seventeenth century in its rhythm as well as its other ornamental qualities. There is a similarity between Melville and Browne in the flowing quality of the prose and in the manipulation of words to add to the sonority of phrase. One can hardly prove more than this.~~X~~

In discussing the "polyphony" of Ruskin, Saintsbury says that

. . . determination away from generalization in description was the most powerful aid to the development of a fuller harmony of prose--the writer's anxiety to be particular necessitating, by conscious or unconscious implication, attention to each word, each syllable. . . .²

Having seen the utmost care with which Melville elaborates his style, one can apply the statement to Melville as to Ruskin. Evidently like Ruskin, Melville was full of his subject, and he felt no limits to the application of his knowledge to the beautification of its form. And Melville not only had this wide background to which he could turn for imagery and allusion, but these same books, particularly the Bible and the work of the Elizabethan dramatists including Shakespeare, may have made it easier for him to fall into unconscious metrical patterns.

¹George Saintsbury, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

²*Ibid.*, p. 392.

³See Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

TONE COLOR AND PROSE RHYTHM

The connection between the images and the ideas thus conveyed and the sense medium may vary; so far as the aspects of the ornamented style have been discussed, the association has been merely conventional often. At the same time, (there are words in the language which still retain a more or less definite and direct relation of sound to image.) The sensations and perceptions which these words produce are the most elemental qualities of writing, and since words are essentially representatives of "ideas" which constitute a large part, or all, of the meaning of the sense elements of most words, writers striving for clarity alone may overlook the direct sensation as an element in the technique of writing. Many writers realize the value of a manipulation of the elements of tone color and rhythm, and whether or not the manipulation is entirely conscious in the case of Melville, a study of the vaguer feelings which are attached to the purely sensuous medium and of their connection with the manner of expression as a whole is extremely profitable.

Tone color and syllabic intensities and lengths of words fuse with the interpretative ideas in the total experience, and while these elements are not as easily isolated from the text as are figures of speech and allusions, the possibility of choice in words and variation in pattern makes them definitely a part of ornament.

Parker in his discussion of prose says that ". . . in general, it remains true that, in prose, the medium tends

to be transparent, sacrificing itself in order that nothing may stand between what it reveals to thought and the imagination."¹ He adds that to express the normal kind of life, prose must renounce the musical manner of poetry, but continues,

. . . although the medium of prose is attenuated, . . . it may nevertheless borrow from its content a beauty of rhythm, imagery, and form that will seem to be its very own. For in language, . . . the meaning and the symbol are so closely one, that it becomes impossible, except by analysis, to distinguish them. Prose rhythm is fundamentally a rhythmical movement of ideas, like poetic rhythm, only without regularization; yet, since the ideas are carried by the words, it belongs to them also; images blossom from idea, yet they too seem to belong to the words in which they are incarnated; and the harmony and symmetry which thoughts and images may contain as we compose them synthetically in the memory, make an architecture of words.²

In normal prose a certain amount of rhythm may be obtained through the handling of emphasis, but only as the meaning directs. A conversational tone excludes anything except a hint of elaborate rhythm, and as Saintsbury points out,

A man who talked Taylorian and Brownese would be an intolerable nuisance.³

In this plain style, balance and antithesis of phrase and clause are the primary devices that remain, and the rhythm certainly does not add to it "indefinite and splendid bonuses of sheer musical delight, nor even sets it. . . to a less lavish and abounding, but still additional accomplishment of prose melody."⁴

¹Parker, Principles of Aesthetics, p. 228.

²Ibid., pp. 229-230.

³Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 230.

⁴Ibid., p. 215.

The plainer style has existed side by side with the more elaborate modes of English prose, chiefly for the purpose of expressing ideas which base their appeal on content, while the deliberately ornate style contained the added element of sensory pleasure. There are certain qualities of the ornate style which are due purely to vowel and consonant music; others to rhythmical arrangement. But the words and the sentences definitely determine the nature of whatever rhythm exists, and while the contribution of the "color" of the sound may be separate from the rhythm of prose feet (that is, a word may differ from another in vowel color yet both have the same metrical value), the tone color of a passage may definitely contribute to the rhythmic effect as in the case of alliteration. For this reason, an analysis may logically combine the two.

The use of tone color as a device has always been a practice of the poets, but language is so far from its original state that the deliberate selection of words the sound of which corresponds partially to the meaning is a problem of considerable complexity. The choice of words and the arrangement of sentences establish both tone color and rhythm, but words more often, as has been shown, add to style much more than mere sensory appeal. But the beauty of the direct perceptual patterns should not be neglected in criticism.

There is perhaps more actual value in certain general correspondences of sound and thought than the reading of average prose would lead one to believe. In the first

place, dullness and monotony are as definite handicaps to the writer as grammatical errors and awkwardness. The color and form of words are important factors in the construction of prose. It is often these qualities which make the distinction between mere conversation, which is loose, fragmentary, and often ungrammatical, and prose, which is much more than unrimed and unmetered discourse.

The value of what might be called "prose harmony," that is, the satisfactory union of tone color, rhythm, and thought, is two-fold. It enables the writer to hold the attention of the reader by getting him into a rhythmic pattern which carries him along. (The factor of attention is invaluable whatever the aim of the author.) This harmony also has an intrinsic value which is not entirely that derived from content or the more extrinsic values of practicality.

Aside from the general unpatterned vowel and consonant colors, qualities which can be more readily pointed out in actual examples, there are rhetorical and grammatical devices of patterning which are among the means of achieving prose harmony. One of the most effective is alliteration, which has been called "the intensest English ornament of all."¹ This device, more often classified with figures of speech, is really a phase of tone color, and because of the repetition involved in the pattern, it is a definite aid to rhythm.

¹George Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 121.

Melville uses this device continually, even when the effect is not that of onomatopoeia.

In the adjective series and in the other syntactical types of catalogues, alliteration is frequent, and one also notes its use in the choice of single adjectives. Like the other ornamental devices, alliteration appears frequently in the later books, but occasionally it appears in Typee:

A thick canopy of tree hung over the very verge of the fall, leaving an arched aperture for the passage of the waters, which imparted a strange picturesque-ness to the scene.¹

The true alliteration at the beginning of the syllables is echoed by like sounds within the words.

The father. . . had once possessed prodigious physical powers. . . .²

The examples are so few, however, that one suspects that they are not yet evidence of deliberate use of alliteration.

There is more in Mardi, as the ornamented style develops:

Let the Oregon Indian through bush, bramble, and brier, hunt his enemy's trail . . .

. . . half clad forms presenting a perpetual and profound salutation.⁴

. . . vacillating between virtue and vice . . .⁵

Thus deeper and deeper into Time's endless tunnel, does the winged soul, like a night-hawk, wind her wild way; and finds eternities before and behind; and her last limit is her everlasting beginning.⁶

¹Typee, p. 52.

²Ibid., p. 64.

³Mardi, p. 455.

⁴Ibid., p. 488.

⁵Ibid., p. 501.

⁶Ibid., p. 504.

The use is too obvious to be other than deliberate here, and it appears most frequently in the choice of adjectives: "stalwart slaves," "sociable sea," "wild wine." As is so often true of Melville's style, the devices are often put to humorous use:

Now, the smell of good things is no very bad thing in itself. It is the savor of good things beyond; proof positive of a glorious good meal. So snuffing up those zephyrs from Araby the blest, those boisterous gales, blowing from out the mouths of baked boars, stuffed with bread-fruit, bananas, and sage, we would fain have gone down and partaken.¹

The humor in this passage is not due entirely, of course, to alliteration, but its use, particularly the repetition of "b" and "g," bolsters up the parallelism and the use of synonyms, which add to the humor of "form."

In Moby Dick and White Jacket, alliteration becomes a definite part of the rhythm and tone color of the style. It is particularly frequent in descriptive passages:

From circumjacent hill-sides, untiring summer hangs perpetually in terraces of vivid verdure; and, embossed with old mosses, convent and castle nestle in valley and glen.²

In this passage there is assonance added to alliteration in "embossed" and "mossed" and "castle" and "nestle." The alliterative passages occur frequently but not excessively, but there are scattered cases of alliteration in double and triple phrases: "cannonading choir," "purple pinnacles and pipes," "fiercely feverish," and this alliteration is more than just ornament. There is almost always a definite relation between the meaning of the words and the emotional

¹Mardi, p. 661.

²White Jacket, p. 1234.

effect of the sound; the added import of the passage is evidence of the remarkable effectiveness of the unity of thought and sound.

For, behold! far away and away, stretches the broad blue of the water, to yonder soft-swell^{ing} hills of light green, backed by the purple pinnacles and pipes of the Grand Organ Mountains; fitly so-called, for in thunder-time they roll cannonades down the bay, drowning the blended bass of all the cathedrals in Rio. . . . But nervous Haydn could not have endured that cannonading choir, since this composer of thunder-bolts himself died at last through the crashing commotion of Napoleon's bombardment of Vienna.¹

The contrast in imagery is strengthened by the contrast in the phrases "yonder soft-swell^{ing} hills of light green," with only three really harsh sounds, and the actual crash of the last sentence with the rough "k" and "b" sounds and the hissing "s's." The vowel color is also well-managed, particularly in the phrase "in thunder-time they roll cannonades down the bay, drowning the blended bass of all the cathedrals in Rio," in which the preponderance of dark vowels, along with the more ornamental assonance in "ā," adds to the harmony of thought and sound.

X The following passage from Moby Dick is perhaps an exaggerated case, but is an excellent example:

While he was speak^{ing} these words, the howling of the shrieking, slanting storm seemed to add new power to the preacher, who, when describing Jonah's sea-storm, seemed tossed by a storm himself. His deep chest heaved as with a ground-swell; his tossed arms seemed the warring elements at work; and the thunders that rolled away from off his swarthy brow, and the light leaping from his eye, made all his simple hearers look

¹ White Jacket, p. 1234.

on him with a quick fear that was strange to them.¹
 In the first sentence the letter "s" is repeated thirteen times, ten times at the first of syllables. The force of this sibilant hissing is made more powerful by the "p's" and "d's." The contrast of light and dark vowels emphasizes the tossing movement which is carried on by the parallelism of the next sentence in which the same contrast is continued, as one can see by comparing the dark vowels in "thunders that rolled away from off his swarthy brow," with the light vowels in "light leaping from his eye."

This alliteration is continued on through Melville's later works. In Pierre, however, it appears less organically related to the style, or rather, to the tone of the book. It adds to the lurking melodrama of the plot when the loved one is said to be "murmuring meanings of unearthly import; and summoning up to him all the subterranean sprites and gnomes."¹ Alliteration occurs in strips of considerable length and in short passages: "pride's priestess," "detested and distorted images. . . and a duty subterfuge of the diving and ducking moralities of this earth," "battledore of both batteries," and then occurs only in paragraphs of more elaborate description.

In Benito Cereno, the keynote of the story is set by a paragraph the tone of which is poetic partly because of the extreme alliteration and repetition:

¹Moby Dick, p. 787.

The morning was one peculiar to that coast. Everything was mute and calm; everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like wave lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mould. The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. ¹ Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come.

The "s" alliteration is carried through the whole paragraph, as is the repetition of the word or thought "gray," really repeated in the "shadows" of the last sentences in thought if not in tone color. Not only is the tone quiet and smooth, but the rhythm is that undulating movement which Melville can create in his prose as if he had become intensely aware of this feeling from his many hours on shipboard.

There are other device in Melville's style which add to the rhythmical quality of the prose, most of which have been discussed as parts of the ornamented style and need only to be pointed out. The simplest kind of prose rhythm is that produced by logical arrangement of thought such as one finds in the more expository chapters and passages; the more complex rhythms are the result of cumulative clauses and phrases, and more elaborate grammatical and rhetorical devices, such as repetition, parallelism, inversion contrasted with natural order, and series of synonyms.

Saintsbury says that "from prose no rhythm is excluded," but that no single rhythm pattern should be repeated too

¹ Herman Melville, Benito Cereno, in Jones and Leisy, Major American Writers, p. 1058.

² George Saintsbury, op. cit., 225.

much or represented in too absolutely complete a fashion.¹ Variety, not regularity, is the one abiding rule in prose rhythm as opposed to poetic rhythm in which there is a conflict between regularity and variety. Generally speaking, the more inevitable the accent in prose, the more one considers it to be "metered." However, there is not, or should not be, any large degree of recurrence of any foot pattern; in fact, the practice is generally condemned, by Saintsbury among others, even when the prose masters, such as Ruskin and Dickens, fall back upon blank verse as a stylistic trick. The rhythm which is considered legitimate in prose is that dependent upon sentence construction -- balance of phrase and clause, mixture of long sentences and clauses with those of contrasting length or shortness, and rhetorical devices. This broader sweep may be reinforced by word rhythm, but to fall into regular rhythms is indication of stylistic weaknesses.²

Since it is impossible to set up any rules beyond that of variety, except to say in general it is better that prose progress rather than return to a basic pattern as does verse, it is only from an actual study of passages that one can judge the means used to achieve rhythm in prose. The harmony can be seen and heard, and the additional contribution of tone color noted, for the beautiful sentence depends much

¹George Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 225.

²Ibid., p. 41.

upon these minor beauties of phrase and word and letter.¹

The style of Moby Dick has been called epic and rhythmic by Mumford, Weaver, Winters, and others in their critical analyses, but always in the most general terms. Forsythe says that Pierre is often written in metered prose. Taking for granted that there are passages which might scan as broken blank verse or excellent free verse, one cannot escape the fact that all of Melville's novels are in prose form, and that to take the material and rearrange it proves very little. Saintsbury points out that the novel encourages deviation from the colorless rhythm of standard prose, and perhaps one may assume that the more the life presented in the novel differs from the normal mode of living, the more admissible are variations from the normal manner of expression.

Some passages have been chosen from the works to show the various phases of Melville's style but with particular reference to rhythm and tone color. These passages were selected as being as nearly representative of the style of the books in which they occur as is possible. The selections are all descriptive, for it is in descriptive passages that Melville has wider scope, narrative and dialogue being naturally restricted.

The following passage is from Typee. It is what one might call "medium-rhythmed," that is to say that the rhythm is more a result than a means in itself, and is due largely

¹George Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 222.

to phrasing rather than to metrical elaboration.

The sight that now greeted us was one that will ever be vividly impressed upon my mind. Five foaming streams, rushing through as many gorges, and swelled and turbid by the recent rains, united together in one mad plunge of nearly eighty feet, and fell with wild uproar into a deep black pool scooped out of the gloomy-looking rocks that lay piled around, and thence in one collected body dashed down a narrow sloping channel which seemed to penetrate into the very bowels of the earth. Overhead, vast roots of trees hung down from the sides of the ravine, dripping with moisture, and trembling with the concussions produced by the fall. It was now sunset, and the feeble uncertain light that found its way into these caverns and woody depths heightened their strange appearance, and reminded us that in a short time we should find ourselves in utter darkness.

Many of the phrases are conventional and unimaginative:

"through as many gorges," "lay piled around," "in one collected body." The alliteration in "five foaming" has a slight tone color, but the rhythm is more definitely that of parallel phrases: "rushing," "swelled and turbid," and "dripping," "trembling." The weight of "deep black pool" with its almost equally accented words, with the weight of the verb "scooped," is a nice effect in itself and echoes "one mad plunge." The paragraph is a long rhythmic arc as the sentences lead up to and away from the second, which is the climax in length and intensity.

Here we lay forty-eight hours, during which the cold was intense. I wondered at the liquid sea, which refused to freeze in such a temperature. The clear, cold sky overhead looked like a steel blue cymbal, that might ring, could you smite it. Our breath came and went like puffs of smoke from pipe-bowls. At first there was a long gawky swell, that obliged us to furl most of the sails, and even to send down t¹-gallant yards for fear of pitching them overboard.¹

¹White Jacket, p. 1170.

In this passage from White Jacket one sees a much neater sort of rhythm, particularly in keeping with the content of the paragraph. The preponderance of short words emphasizes the crispness of the rhythm and increases the solidity of tone, which the shortness and simplicity of the sentences also adds to. The definite quality of accented syllables in the first clause is perfect with the idea of stability, which is implied. There is a scarcely perceptible building up of sentence length paralleling the change in tone from absolute stillness to a slightly rocking rhythm. The line of short puffing iambs in the middle makes an interesting contrast, and also corresponds with the "puffs of breath" which is echoed by the "p" alliteration and the subtle repetition of the "k" sound. The rhythm of the last sentence is largely one of phrases which gives the desired tone color. However, with the possible exception of the third sentence, the prose is hardly that which is called metered, but it illustrates the harmony of tone which comes of complete mastery of words, the inevitable correspondence, reasoned or unreasoned, of form and matter in the hands of an artist. There is charm in the simplicity of the figure and the touch of personification in "gawky swell."

Melville's early prose is not the inevitable rhythmized prose which drops into rhapsody or blank verse, except in certain sections of Mardi. The accents are fairly obvious, but the foot division is by no means definite, a variety of interpretation being possible usually. But one cannot deny

the effect of the whole, or the swing of phrase which is the peculiar merit of this plainer, more standard style.

Here the scene was awful. The vessel seemed to be sailing on her side. The main-deck guns had several days previous been run in and housed, and the port-holes closed, but the lee carronades on the quarter-deck and fore-castle were plunging through the sea, which undulated over them in milk-white billows of foam. With every lurch to leeward the yard-arm-ends seemed to dip in the sea, while forward the spray dashed over the bows in cataracts, and drenched the men who were on the fore-yard. By this time the deck was alive with the whole strength of the ship's company, five hundred men, officers and all, mostly clinging to the weather bulwarks. The occasional phosphorescence of the yeasting sea cast a glare upon their uplifted faces, as a night fire in a populous city lights up the panic-stricken crowd.¹

The increasing length of the first three sentences gives the effect of rising to a climax. The words are short and precise in effect for the most part, and the exceptions are effectively used. The elaboration is comparatively simple with the exception of the last figure. The sound correspondence is particularly consistent in spite of the use of technical terms in speaking of parts of the ship. The paragraph carries out the idea of the ship lurching through the waves: the entithesis of phrase starts the swaying motions-- "With every lurch to leeward. . .forward the spray dashed" -- while within the longer sweeps the consonants dash against one another, emphasized by the alliteration in "lurch to leeward" and "dashed" and "drenched." Both the rhythm of the last sentence and the image involved add to the concreteness of the picture. There is the variety of rhythm which is considered the criterion of good prose, and although the para-

¹ White Jacket, p. 1172.

graph is not one of elaborate harmony, the whole effect is powerful.

~~X~~In Moby Dick the harmonies seem grander in keeping with the greater scope of the story. Some sections really deserve the name of metered prose, but the average tone is better represented by less definitely rhythmized prose~~X~~ than the following passage:

Close to our bows, strange forms in the water darted hither and thither before us; while thick in our rear flew the inscrutable sea-ravens. And every morning, perched on our stays, rows of these birds were seen; and spite of our hooting, for a long time obstinately clung to the heap, as though they deemed our ship some drifting, uninhabited craft; a thing appointed to desolation, and therefore fit roosting-place for their homeless selves. And heaved and heaved, still unrestingly heaved the black sea, as if its vast tides were a conscience; and the great mundane soul were in anguish and remorse for the long sin and suffering it had bred. Cape of Good Hope, do they call ye? Rather Cape Tormento, as called of yore; for long allured by the perfidious silences that before had attended us, we found ourselves launched into this tormented sea, where guilty beings transformed into those fowls and these fish, seemed condemned to swim on everlastingly without any haven in store, or beat that black air without any horizon. But calm, snow-white, and unvarying; still directing its fountain of feathers to the sky; still beckoning us from before, the solitary jet would at times be descried.¹

This paragraph exhibits most of the characteristics of Melville's ornate style, except in the absence of allusions. The rhythm is achieved by parallelism, synonyms, inversion, repetition. There are the personification implied in the adjectives which is a frequent device with Melville, though here it hardly deserves the condemnation of the term "pathetic

¹Moby Dick, p. 901.

fallacy," and the usual alliteration.

Examples of the simple, straight-forward expository manner have been given (p. 18, Ch. III), and by way of contrast two passages will be shown which are of the metered prose. The first is from the chapter on dreams in Mardi, and partakes definitely of the dream-like atmosphere; in describing Tartary and Siberia:

Deathful, desolate dominions those; bleak and wild the ocean, beating at that barrier's base, hovering 'twixt freezing and foaming; and freighted with navies of icebergs -- warring worlds crossing orbits; their long icicles, projecting like spears to the charge. Wide away stream the floes of drift ice, frozen cemeteries of skeletons and bones. White bears howl as they drift from their cubs; and the grinding islands crush the skulls of the peering seals.¹

The alliteration is much more forced, the word order inverted, and there is the choppiness of phrase and clause often typical of Mardi. In this phase of writing, Melville's style more closely resembles that of the writers of free-verse, rather than any set form, such as blank verse.

The soliloquy of Ahab in Moby Dick in the chapter called "Sunset" was used directly as a recitative in Renard Herman's cantata "Moby Dick" which is based on the book. The passage is one of the most musical that Melville ever wrote.

Yonder, by the ever-brimming goblet's rim, the warm waves blush like wine. The gold brown plumbs the blue. The diver sun -- slow dived from noon -- goes down; my soul mounts up! she wearies with her endless hill. Is, then, the crown too heavy that I wear? this Iron Crown of Lombardy. Yet is it bright with many a gem; I the

¹ Mardi, p. 576.

wearer, see not its far flashings; but darkly feel that I wear that, that dazzlingly confounds. 'Tis iron - that I know -- not gold. 'Tis split, too -- that I feel; the jagged edge galls me so, my brain seems to beat against the solid metal; aye, steel skull, mine; the sort that needs no helmet in the most brain battering fight! Dry heat upon my brow? Oh, time was, when the sunrise nobly spurred me, the sunset soothed. No more. This lovely night, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne'er enjoy. Gifted with the high perceptions I lack the low enjoying power; damned, most subtly and most malignantly! damped in the midst of Paradise! Good night -- good night!¹

The final soliloquy of Pierre offers an interesting contrast:

'Here, then is the untimely, timely end; -- Life's last chapter well stitched into the middle! Nor book, nor author of the book, hath any sequel, though each hath its last lettering! -- It is ambiguous still. Had I been heartless now, disowned, and spurningly portioned off the girl at Saddle Meadows, then had I been happy through a long life on earth, and perchance through a long eternity in heaven! Now, 'tis merely hell in both worlds. Well, be it hell. I will mold a trumpet of the flames, and, with my breath of flame, breathe back my defiance! But give me first another body! I long and long to die, to be rid of this dishonored cheek. Hung by the neck till thou be dead. -- Not if I forestall you, though! -- Oh, now to live is death, and now to die is life; now, to my soul, were a sword my midwife!²

The last phrases drop into a positive sing-song whereas the rhythm of the paragraphs from Moby Dick are much more subtly managed in spite of the greater complexity of the style. It seems to be the lack of variety in the prose of Pierre which leads to excessive and monotonous rhythm. The better passages avoid this error.

The style of Israel Potter is rhythmically sedate for the most part; this particularly suits the story of the wandering

¹Moby Dick, p. 859.

²Pierre, p. 400.

of the hero. Much of the prose is merely perfunctory in style, but there are passages which are skillfully managed.

Hung in long, sepulchral arches of stone, the black besmoked bridge seemed a huge scarf of crape, festooning the river across. Similar funeral festoons spanned it to the west, while eastward, towards the sea, tiers and tiers of jetty, colliers lay moored, side by side, fleets of black swans.¹

Here are the same devices: alliteration, repetition, imagery; the balancing of a modifying participle before and after the first clause is a neat trick, and the contrast in the next sentence carries out the rhythm.

Benito Cereno is a curious combination in style: a great deal of it is precisely and matter-of-factly expressed, yet occasionally there will be a sentence or paragraph of description which is definitely on the metrical side. The passages add to the flavor of the story, which is otherwise narrated in a concise style. Redburn, of the early books, has something of this combination. The preciseness and realism is seen in the careful attention to detail; the elaboration and more rhythmical style are used for added effectiveness.

One could make endless analyses of passages, pointing out the varied rhythms, the means of achieving tone color effects, the grammatical and rhetorical devices, but the result would be only an even more convincing array of the devices already pointed out. Seldom is the rhythm of Melville's prose obtrusive; the oratorical address which he uses on certain occasions seems to be a justifiable deviation from the normal type of prose just as are his metrical passages. On the whole the rhythm grows out of a basic arrangement of word, phrase, and clause.

¹Israel Potter, p. 1456.

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE

After writing Moby Dick, Melville finished Pierre: or the Ambiguities, the novel which was a decided failure. This failure was probably as much the result of the style of the book as of the "most unmoral moral" of the story, "the impracticality of virtue."¹ It is with regard to the degeneration of style that critics have been particularly anxious to establish influences. The solutions to the problem have been various, from excessive imitation of other writers to suppositions of insanity in Melville.² Contemporary critics objected to the mysticism and obscurity of the writing, and the society in which Melville lived did not receive his caustic remarks on civilization in general and the middle nineteenth century in particular without protest.

Melville was not content with a surface skimming of life. He said in a letter to his publisher:

I love all men who dive. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more; and if he don't attain the bottom, why, all the lead in Galena can't fashion the plummet [sic] that will.³

The books which added to Melville's literary notoriety are

¹Quoted by Minnigerode from the Literary World, op. cit., p. 163.

²Raymond Weaver, op. cit.,

³Quoted by Minnigerode, op. cit., p. 33.

those in which he was attempting his deepest dives.

This quality is now recognized by most critics, but there is still the inescapable fact that in Pierre and some of the later books, there is an actual degeneration of the magnificent style of Moby Dick. In Melville's best style, there is a kind of formality of expression which in Pierre becomes a stilted manner, and while there are a few passages which are as skillfully written as one could wish, there is an unreal tone over the whole of the book. This tone is a sort of dingy, melodramatic air, to which the utterly unreal dialogue of the main characters largely contributes.

In the first place, the theme of Pierre is one which Melville had not touched upon in any except his very first literary attempts: the theme of love. Furthermore, the problem is more than the simple one of "boy meets girl," and is, rather, an attempt to delve into the most complex psychological patterns of sexual relationship, made more involved by the underlying current of incestuous desire. On this pattern, Melville imposes the story of the literary growth of his hero, and many other philosophical problems, so that many themes are inextricably interwoven.

This factor of content may have been important in the production of the style, which as Forsythe points out, is really "Pierreian" rather than "Melvillean," since it has characteristics which, while they occur in other forms in Melville's previous works, are certainly combined so that

the result is unlike anything else in Melville's writing.

The dialogues has been mentioned as unusual. Some of it is realistic and amusing, but the conversation of the principal characters is made highly mannered by the frequent use of stilted phrases and the "thee" and "thou" address, together with the old second person singular form of the verb. The characters themselves seem unreal, not only for this dialogue, but also because of the absolute nature of their personalities as Melville draws them.

The descriptions of the book are drawn much as are those of the ornamented style with allusions and figures, but they seem too elaborately drawn for human characterization, and consequently often degenerate into conceits:

She seemed molded from fire and air, and vivified at some voltaic pile of August thunder-clouds heaped against the sunset.¹

The style is also inconsistent in its quality and full of grammatical errors. It seems that in this book, one has all of the ornaments of Melville's finest style, but because it lacks something which the other books had, the tricks are no longer successful. Occasionally Melville is able to grasp some of his old power of biting satire and irony, and at times the sonorous eloquence seems to fit the occasion, but just as Melville left the problem of good and evil in the world unsolved, so he left Pierre in an amorphous state as far as its style is concerned.

¹ Pierre, p. 169.

The following passage is typical of the exaggerated and inflated nature of the style:

No Cornwall miner ever sunk so deep a shaft beneath the sea, as Love will sink beneath the floatings of the eyes. Love sees ten million fathoms down, till dazzled by the floor of pearls. The eye is Love's own magic glass, where all things that are not of earth, glide in supernatural light. There are not so many fishes in the sea, as there are sweet images in lovers' eyes. In those miraculous translucencies swim the strange eye-fish with wings, that sometimes leap out, instinct with joy; moist fish-wings wet the lover's cheek. Love's eyes are holy things; therein the mysteries of life are lodged; looking in each other's eyes, lovers see the ultimate secrets of the worlds; and with thrills eternally untranslatable, feel that Love is god of all. . . . Love is both Creator's and Savior's gospel to mankind; a volume bound in rose-leaves, clasped with violets, and by the beaks of humming-birds printed with peach juice on the leaves of lilies.¹

The conceits are like those of a metaphysical lyric rather than the figures one would expect in a prose style. They are multiplied until the readers wonder where the end will come. The passage above is but a section of a four-page digression on Love. Pierre's reveries are highly complex and full of these same kinds of conceits:

Now, thank God, thought Pierre, the night is past,-- the night of Chaos and Doom; the day only, and the skirt of the evening remain. May heaven new-string my soul, and confirm me in the Christ-like feeling I first felt.²

There are many more compound and artificially formed words in Pierre than in the early books. The sentences are not as wilfully distorted as they are in Mardi, but they almost invariable have an oratorical ring which is due in

¹Herman Melville, Pierre, p. 37.

²Ibid., p. 120.

part to the excessive rhythm of the style. There are the same multiple adjectives but a great deal more repetition of words and phrases for special effects than one considers typical of Melville.

Instantly the room was populous with sounds of melodiousness, and mournfulness, and wonderfulness; the room swarmed with the unintelligible but delicious sounds.¹

The tone of the whole book is one of utmost seriousness, and it may be that the excess of melodrama would not be apparent if there was an occasional touch of lightness. Several of the characters do add a bit of humor, but this humor they carry within themselves and do not bequeath to the lugubrious hero. Possibly this dullness of tone was due to the state of mind in which Melville found himself after he had finished Moby Dick. Even if one discounts other influences, one remembers that Melville's health was very poor, that he was on the verge of blindness.

After writing Pierre he assayed no long work until Israel Potter, published in 1855. In that year he also published Benito Cereno, probably his best short story. It is again in the style which is Melville at his best. He is back with the sea as his background and the atmosphere of mystery which he portrays so well. Israel Potter drags in spots, but the style is not inflated like that of Pierre, and it retains many of the excellencies of the style of White Jacket. There are passages of magnificent description; the sea fight between the Serapis and the Bon Homme Richard and the picture of London "In the City of Dis." There is not

¹Herman Melville, Pierre, p. 141.

the rollicking humor of White Jacket, but a sort of dry, sardonic laughter behind the style which creeps out in irony and satire, and in the choice of adjectives:

Not long after, an invisible hand came and set down a great yellow lamp in the east. The hand reached up unseen from below the horizon, and set the lamp down right on the rim of the horizon, as on a threshold; as much to say, Gentlemen warriors, permit me a little to light up this rather gloomy looking subject. . . . Objects before perceived with difficulty, now glimmered ambiguously. Bedded in strange vapors, the great footlight cast a dubious, half-demoniac glare across the waters, like the phantasmagoric stream sent athwart a London flagging in a night-rain from an apothecary's blue and green window.¹

In this passage can be seen the characteristics of the ornate style, perhaps somewhat toned down to a quiet place: the personification implied in the rising of the moon; the double and compound adjectives; the detailed and elaborate figure at the end.

In Benito Cereno one finds an excellent mystery story, told in Melville's best style. The explanation of the vague and sinister happenings on board the ship of Captain Delano is added in an appendix which purports to be a record of the true history of the case; this is Melville's old stunt of using authorities to gain realism. The style moves more rapidly than that of Moby Dick and there are not as many allusions, but in passages the figures and allusions are as complex as the most ornamented phase of Melville's style. A great deal of alliteration is found, but the average rhythm is more precise than symphonic.

¹Israel Potter, p. 1432.

As the whale-boat drew more and more nigh, the cause of the peculiar pipe-clayed aspect of the stranger was seen to be the slovenly neglect pervading her. The spars, ropes, and great part of the bulwarks, looked wooly, from long unacquaintance with the scraper, tar, and the brush. Her keel seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekeil's Valley of Dry Bones.¹

Melville seems in the last two books to have mastered the third-person narrative, for he handles it with ease, and in Benito Cereno, he manages without obvious humor, although there is an innate quality, hardly definable, which keeps the ornament from seeming out of place.

Contrary to the belief of some of Melville's critics, his style is a curiously organic thing, when one considers how for so long his later works were regarded as absolute failures. Such a modern critic as Ivor Winters would place the best of Melville's work after Moby Dick, and both Weaver and Mumford recognize a great deal of effective writing in the later books.

¹Herman Melville, Benito Cereno, op. cit., p. 1059.

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